

Elizabeth Borelli's

Beanalicious Living

There are dozens of reasons to bring more beans into your diet. High in fiber, low in fat and chock full of nutrients, you'll be surprised at the many ways to prepare amazingly delicious bean dishes.

They're so easy to prepare, in fact, that whether you're using dried or pre-cooked, it's hard to go wrong (and harder still to overcook them). Just follow these straightforward guidelines for bean cooking made easy:

1. Begin by rinsing beans in cold water. Most beans require soaking for up to eight hours or overnight for thorough cooking and increased digestibility. Soak your beans in enough tap water, at room temperature, to cover by at least 3 inches of water. Beans expand to up to two and a half times the size of dried, so plan accordingly. After soaking overnight, if you don't cook them that day, replace the soaking water, refrigerate, and cook the next day.
2. Drain soaking water and replace with fresh, room-temperature tap water for cooking. Beans should be covered by at least 3 inches of water during cooking.
3. Increase digestibility with de-gassing herbs. A couple tablespoons of dried bay leaf or the Mexican cooking spice epazote are very effective, or add a piece of kombu (a type of seaweed) during cooking to pre-neutralize any potential digestive problems.
4. Bring beans to a simmer and cook uncovered for the recommended time based upon variety, or until tender. Stir occasionally and add more water if needed.
5. Wait until beans are fully cooked to add salt, but you can add 1 tablespoon of olive oil to the beans during cooking to reduce foaming and prevent boiling over.

6. Remove beans from heat and let cool in the cooking water to keep them from drying out.

Beans last up to five days in the refrigerator once cooked, but freeze well for up to three months and thaw quickly, especially when added to hot soups or stews.

Store dried beans in an airtight container—jars are perfect for this purpose—in a cool, dry environment, away from direct sunlight, for up to 12 months.

The Quick Soak Method

If you're in a hurry, here's a super-quick preparation suggestion. It's also the most effective de-gassing method I know.

In a large saucepan, cover dried beans with three times their volume of water and bring to a boil. Boil for 2 minutes. Remove from heat, cover, and let stand for one hour. Drain.

Refill the same saucepan with an equivalent measure of water to beans. Again bring beans to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer, covered (adding extra water if necessary), for about 45 minutes to 1¼ hours, depending on the type of bean you're using. Drain and enjoy in your favorite, bean-friendly fashion.

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