

How do I cook BEANS? (It's really easy, just takes time.) Your Basic Bean Cooking Instructions:

Before anything else: **Pick and sort your beans!** Beans are a raw agricultural product and they are likely to have debris picked up in harvesting them. Don't ever trust any machine-cleaning process—nor anyone else's bean cleaning but YOUR OWN. Lay beans out, one bean thick, on a flat, well-lit surface—a counter-top or table-top, dark beans on a light surface or light beans on a dark surface for good contrast. As you brush them off the edge into a bowl, this will allow you to find and discard any bad beans, signs of mold, pits or poor development, and any little clods of soil, husk, or pebbles. [Careful—some stones look almost like beans. You don't want to chip a tooth or have your guests experience true grit in the middle of a wonderful dinner.]

Next, **Rinse beans** thoroughly and drain. This allows you to double-check in case you missed some dirt. Then, **Soak beans** until swelled completely, at least double in size. Put cleaned beans in a saucepan of fresh drinking water. Sometimes tap water has minerals which will toughen beans. Covered with double the amount of water over the beans, soak them for a few hours—or better still overnight before your cooking day.

Some people at this stage choose to **SPROUT** their beans in order to allow healthful enzymes to kick in and change some of the bean starches to more digestible compounds. To sprout beans, rinse and drain beans 2-4 times per day in an open-air jar (covered with gauze, net or screen) for 2-3 days before cooking. Sprouted beans can also be used raw in salads when they begin to show signs of opening cotyledons.

Quick alternative for soaking: you can bring rinsed beans immediately to a boil then cover them, remove from heat, then let them soak in the same water for another 1 ½-2 hours.

Change the water: Drain off liquid and rinse beans. It is important to change the water as it removes the natural chemicals contained in their seed coat to delay germination, and which do not sit well with digestion. Give the bean water back to the earth or to your compost.

Cooking beans: Cooking time will vary depending on bean size and the length of storage time. (We know from archaeology that beans can be edible even after 1000 years!) Older beans just take longer soaking and cooking. Add fresh drinking water to cover beans in pot with at least 2" of water over the beans. On the stove-top, simmer beans --without salt-- 1 - 2 hours or more until they test tender. Some people enjoy an *al dente* texture. Others like them cooked longer to be softer. Alternatively beans can be slow-cooked in a crock-pot on high with plenty of water for 4-6 hours. Solar oven cookery for beans is ideal; if you are attentive and keep the solar oven aimed directly at the sun, your pre-soaked beans can be done easily in 3-4 hours.

Nothing could be easier than cooking beans! And the rewards are great. With beans **patience** is the word! Dry beans take a long time to prep and cook, but with one cooked batch you can separate out enough for serving 3 or 4 totally different meals. Because they are a high-protein food, cool or chill your cooked beans by placing them in shallow pyrex dishes, cover and refrigerate. Try freezing them in different batches to use later for dips, refries, burritos, soups, marinated bean salad, hummus..... With beans the list of tasty dishes is exciting and endless, not to mention nutritious.

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