

Pot Of Beans

Around the world, beans are a commonly eaten food. They are versatile, affordable, and can be quickly grown. Beans also have a quality nutritional composition and can improve people's long-term health and diets who regularly eat beans. Every type of cooked dry bean is a good source of fiber and protein, and many are excellent sources of potassium. Beans are also naturally fat, cholesterol, and sodium-free.

Dry beans, peas, and lentils can be classified as protein foods or vegetables by the MyPlate Food Guidelines developed by the USDA (US Department of Agriculture). Eating dry beans provides a great source of dietary fiber. A one-half cup serving of cooked dry beans can contain 6 to 8 grams of fiber. Beans also contain soluble fiber that helps lower unhealthy blood cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. To reduce gas, add beans to your diet in small amounts (about ¼ cup at a time), so your body can adjust to the increase in fiber over time.

Most beans can be substituted for most other beans in recipes, but their cooking time may vary. The North Dakota State University developed a guide All About Beans Nutrition, Health Benefits, Preparation and Use in Menus that can be found at <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/food-nutrition/all-about-beans-nutrition-health-benefits-preparation-and-use-in-menus> and includes the following information about ways to soak and cook beans.

How To Soak Dry Beans

To begin, closely inspect the dry beans, removing any broken beans or foreign materials. Rinse the beans thoroughly in cold water to remove any dirt or debris. Then choose the soak method you will use. The “hot soak” method is the most preferred.

Hot Soak Method:

- For every 2 cups (1 pound) of dry beans prepared, add 10 cups of cold water to the pot.
- Bring the water to a boil and boil for one to three minutes.
- Remove from heat, cover the pot, and soak for 4 hours. If soaking beans longer than 4 hours place the pot in the refrigerator.
- Drain and rinse soaked beans. Cook and use in recipes.

In addition to the “hot soak” method I explained above, there is also the “traditional soak” method which is the best method for pressure cooking beans, and the “quick soak” method, which is the fastest.

Traditional Soak Method:

- Pour cold water over beans to cover them.
- Soak the beans for 8 hours or overnight in the refrigerator.
- Drain beans and discard the soak water.
- Rinse beans with fresh, cool water.

Quick Soak Method:

- Place beans in a large pot and add 6 cups of water for every 2 cups of beans.
- Bring to boil and boil for an additional 2 to 3 minutes.
- Remove beans from heat, cover the pot, and let stand for 1 hour.
- Drain beans and discard the soak water.
- Rinse beans with fresh, cool water.

Several methods can be used to cook dried beans. Cooking times will vary depending on the beans' variety, size, and age. Realize that dried beans will double in size after soaking and triple after cooking. One cup of dried beans will equal three cups cooked.

To cook beans quickly, try a pressure cooker, following the manufacturer's instructions which allow beans to cook in half the time and eliminate the need for soaking. However, this does not give the beans much time to absorb flavors from other ingredients.

Tips for Cooking Dry Beans

- Cook only one kind of bean at a time if possible. Different types and ages of beans have different cooking times, so avoid cooking different types of beans together.
- Hard water (naturally high in minerals) may affect cooking time/softening of beans. Distilled or softened water may result in a better end product.
- To cook soaked beans, add fresh, cold water to fully cover beans, plus 1 to 2 tablespoons of oil, if you wish. Adding oil prevents foaming and boiling over. The foam also can be skimmed off during cooking. Simmer the beans until they are tender.
- Maintain water at a gentle simmer (not rapid boil) during cooking to prevent split skins.
- Salt, sugar, and any acidic ingredients, such as vinegar, citrus juice, or wine, should not be added until the beans are almost tender. If added at the beginning of the cooking process, they will harden the skins on the beans and prevent them from absorbing the necessary liquid to soften them.
- Do not add baking soda to beans at any time. This will make the beans more tender but destroy the B vitamin thiamine and negatively impact the flavor.
- Flavorings, such as herbs, onions, celery, and carrots, can be added to the cooking water to enhance the flavor of the beans.
- Stir beans occasionally to prevent sticking during cooking.
- Keep beans covered with water during the cooking process. Add cold water periodically during cooking to ensure beans are covered.
- Check beans for doneness before eating. When cooked properly, beans should be tender but not mushy. Skins should still be intact, but the bean can be mashed easily between two fingers or a fork.
- Drain beans immediately after they have reached desired texture to prevent overcooking.

Storage:

Dried beans can be stored up to a year at room temperature in an airtight container. The older the beans are, the longer they will take to cook, so do not mix new beans with old beans. This will cause uneven cooking.

If storing cooked beans, place them in an airtight container and store them in the refrigerator for up to 4 days. Cooked beans can also be frozen for future use. Frozen beans can be stored in the freezer for 5 or 6 months.

Once you soak and cook dried beans, I bet you will prefer this method over buying canned beans. The taste is better, and it is much more cost effective.

(Sources: <https://beaninstitute.com>; [MyPlate.gov](https://myplate.gov); North Dakota State University Extension; United States Department of Agriculture, Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020; US Dry Bean Council, <https://usdrybeans.com>)