

Extension

Seasonal Eating
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Dried Beans—A Winter Staple **January 2015**

Dried beans are a perfect ingredient for hearty, warming dishes in the cold of winter. They fill you up with lots of fiber and are an excellent source of iron. There are lots of different varieties of beans as well which make them interesting to eat.

Southerners are probably most familiar with pinto beans cooked with pork for seasoning. In fact, pintos are the most popular bean in the United States. They can also be used in chili or make excellent refried beans.

Kidney beans come in two colors, light and dark red. They are most often used in chili and in bean salads. The light red ones are featured in creole recipes like red beans and rice also. My Dad loves to eat kidney beans heated with corn syrup and bacon.



Black beans are one of my favorites. I love the smaller size and the earthy flavor. They are often used in Latin and South American cuisine. I like them just cooked like pinto beans or I use them in soup (makes a dark rich liquid) or in enchiladas or chimichangas. Black beans and corn combine well for salads or salsa as well. These cook up quickly and don't have to be pre-soaked.

Navy beans are a small white bean and are perfect for baked beans. When adding anything acidic to beans, like molasses or tomato products, be sure to add it after the beans get tender or it can prevent them from softening up.

Great Northern beans can also be used in baked bean recipes or casseroles and their delicate flavor makes them a good choice for salads.

Cranberry beans are a member of the white bean family with beautiful red speckles which unfortunately disappear when cooked. These are excellent in Italian dishes.

Lima beans come in baby size and large (sometimes called butter beans) and are great in soups or as a side dish by themselves or as a part of succotash.

To evenly cook beans and keep them from breaking open, it is best to presoak them. You can cover them with room temperature water and soak overnight or you can quick soak when you're in a hurry by covering them with water, boiling for two minutes and then removing from the heat to soak for 1 hour or so. Drain off the

soaking liquid and add fresh water to cook. Also, don't add your salt until the beans are almost tender as it can toughen the skins. Old beans may not ever soften up when cooked so try to use them up within a year.

Last fall I used dried beans layered in jars on my mantel so I had a big bag of mixed beans to use when I switched to the Christmas décor. So over the holidays I found these great soup mugs for \$2 and decided to make a mixed bean soup with my bag of beans. Although it's usually recommended to cook only one type of bean together because cooking times vary, in a soup I don't mind if some are overcooked and a little softer. I also did not soak these, but you could certainly soak them and cut down on the cooking time to about an hour and a half.

For more ideas on using seasonal produce, visit the Bedford County Extension website (<https://utextension.tennessee.edu/bedford>) and click on Seasonal Eating.

Mixed Bean Soup with Smoked Sausage

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 onion, chopped
2 stalks celery, chopped
1 large carrot, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
2 bay leaves
8 cups chicken broth
2 cups mixed dried beans
1/2 pound smoked sausage, chopped
1 (14 1/2-ounce) can whole tomatoes
Salt to taste

In a large Dutch oven or stock pot, heat olive oil. Add onion, celery and carrot and sauté until onion is translucent and carrots are slightly tender. Add garlic, thyme, red pepper flakes, black pepper and bay leaves. Let cook for a minute and then pour in the chicken broth and add the beans. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer and cook until beans are just tender, about 2-2 1/2 hours. Be sure to test several beans and stir occasionally to prevent sticking. Add the sausage and the tomatoes with liquid, breaking them up with a spoon. Taste and add a little salt, if needed. Simmer until everything is heated through.