

Seasonal Eating
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Winter Calls for Soups and Beans
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Comfort foods help keep you warm and filled up during the winter months and soups and beans are two dishes that are perfect comfort foods. A pot of beans cooking on the stove, served with cornbread or crusty French bread is the best meal on a blustery day.

Lima beans with their creamy interior are some of my favorite beans. So the other day while I was taking down all of the Christmas decorations, I made a butter bean soup to simmer on the stove. A well-seasoned broth filled with creamy lima beans and tasty cubes of ham, finished with a bright hit of lemon and fresh parsley and green onions. It was the perfect definition of a comfort food after a tiring day of working.



I used dried large lima beans for my soup. It will take a couple of hours for these to cook. You can cut the cooking time about in half by soaking them overnight or, if you are in a hurry, you can use canned lima beans and just add them and cook until hot in your seasoned broth.

One of the keys to a really good soup is a delicious broth and this one is seasoned with chopped onion, carrots, celery and garlic along with several herbs and spices including cumin for a little smoky, earthy flavor and oregano, thyme and paprika. Adjust the red pepper flakes to your liking, adding more if you like a spicy kick to your soups. If you like a thicker soup, use a little less chicken broth, about 6 cups, or use the full amount for a brothier soup. The beans will release some of their starch as they cook and thicken up the broth. For a creamier broth, stir often to release more of the starch and break down some of the beans and for a thinner, clearer broth, stir occasionally as they cook.

If lima beans are not your favorite, you can certainly substitute pinto beans, black-eyed peas or white beans. I just used a thick slice of ham from the deli and chopped it into small 1/4" cubes but if you have leftover ham, that works well too.

The lemon juice at the end, brightens up the flavor and makes it pop. You can adjust the seasoning with salt at the end so it doesn't become too salty as the broth cooks down. I like to have some bread with my soup, whether its cornbread or Hawaiian rolls or a crusty French bread to dip in the juices.

So this winter, when its cold and blustery outside, heat up inside with a hearty, warm and filling soup. For more information and recipes check out the Seasonal Eating page at bedford.tennessee.edu.

Butter Bean and Ham Soup

1 tablespoon olive oil
1 tablespoon butter
1/2 onion, chopped
1 carrot, chopped
3 ribs celery, chopped

2 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon paprika
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1/8 teaspoon red pepper flakes
2 bay leaves
8 cups chicken broth
12 ounces dried large lima beans
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1 cup chopped ham
2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley
2 green onions, sliced
Kosher salt to taste

In a large stock pot, heat the olive oil with the butter until melted. Add the onion, carrots and celery. Sauté until tender with some brown spots, about 15 minutes. Add garlic, paprika, cumin, oregano, thyme, black pepper, red pepper flakes and bay leaves and sauté for a minute or two. Add the chicken broth and beans. Bring to a boil, turn down to a low boil for 20 minutes and then to a simmer and cook, covered, until tender, about 1 1/2 - 2 hours. Add the lemon juice, ham, parsley, green onions and salt to taste. Heat together for a few minutes before serving.