

use your bean

LEGUMES DELIVER FIBER AND PROTEIN FOR PENNIES—AND TASTE GREAT, TOO. HERE, A TEAR-AND-SAVE GUIDE TO SELECTING AND PREPARING THESE NUTRITIONAL POWERHOUSES.

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1. BLACK BEANS

Sometimes called turtle beans, these shiny, purple black legumes are rich in magnesium and have a smooth, velvety texture. Their subtly sweet taste is delicious with smoky flavors, such as chipotle. Try black beans in a cool salad with pineapple, scallions, and cilantro, or use them to stretch ground beef in tacos.

2. BLACK-EYED PEAS

Don't be fooled by the name: Black-eyed peas are actually beans. Small, plump, and spotted, these are an excellent source of folate (an important nutrient for pregnant women that may prevent certain birth defects). They have a rich earthiness that complements salty meats, like bacon and ham. Also try them in a quick sauté with garlic, red bell peppers, cumin, and cayenne.

3. CANNELLINI BEANS

These large, rosy beige kitchen mainstays (also known as white Italian kidney beans) have a creamy consistency and a delicate flavor. Toss them with a vinaigrette and fresh herbs, or puree them with olive oil, lemon, and garlic and spread on grilled bread.

4. CHICKPEAS

Often referred to as garbanzo beans, chickpeas are the most consumed bean in the world. Round and firm, they have a bold, nutty flavor. Chickpeas are the base for hummus and make a filling addition to salads and stews. For a quick weeknight meal, toss them in pasta with spinach and Italian sausage.

CANNED VS. DRIED: WHICH IS BETTER?

If dinner has to be on the table in 20 minutes, canned beans win hands down. Dried beans require prep; they need to be soaked and cooked before you can use them in a recipe (see How to Cook With Dried Beans, opposite). But what they lack in convenience, dried beans make up for in taste and texture; they tend to have a brighter flavor and a firmer consistency. They're also lower in sodium; however, rinsing and draining canned beans can reduce their salt content significantly. As for price? A cup of canned beans costs about 69 cents; a cup of cooked dried beans, about 24 cents. Bottom line: Whichever type you choose, you're getting a healthy bargain.

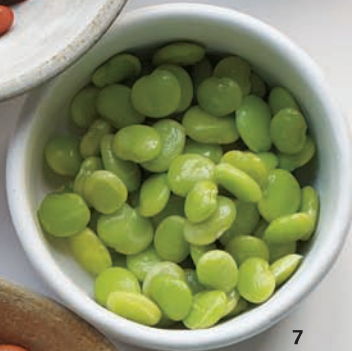




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5. GREAT NORTHERN BEANS

These small, mild beans are a good source of calcium, delivering more than most other varieties. Because they easily absorb seasoning, they work well in stews and soups, such as ribollita (beans, greens, tomatoes, pancetta, and stale bread).

6. KIDNEY BEANS

This variety, known for its reddish skin and white interior, packs protein, heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids, and iron, plus about the same amount of cancer-fighting antioxidants as blueberries. A popular chili ingredient, kidney beans have a hearty flavor that also tastes great in salads with crisp vegetables, like fennel and red onion. You can use them in place of pinto beans in most recipes.

7. LIMA BEANS

Green and flat, lima beans commonly come in two types. Butter (or Fordhook) beans are larger and full of potassium; baby lima beans (shown) are smaller and sweeter. Both have a buttery flavor and a starchy interior that can turn mushy, so they're best in quick sautés (top with lemon juice and Parmesan). They are often sold cooked and frozen.

8. PINTO BEANS

These light brown beans have substantial amounts of fiber and protein. Play up their earthy flavor and smooth texture in an easy Mexican soup: Combine chicken broth, beans, and a dash of hot sauce, and sprinkle with avocado and tortilla chips.

HOW TO COOK WITH DRIED BEANS

Dried beans are not as hard to prepare for use in a recipe as you think. Below, find easy instructions for soaking and cooking them according to how much time you have. Your first move should be to discard beans that are discolored or shriveled; then rinse them with cold water in a colander.

STEP 1: SOAK THEM.

If you have an hour: Place the beans in a large saucepan and add water to cover. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer for 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from heat and let stand, covered, for 1 hour.

If you have all night (and don't want to lift a finger): Place the beans in a large saucepan and add enough water to cover. Let soak at room temperature for 8 to 10 hours.

STEP 2: COOK THEM.

Drain the soaked beans and return them to the pot. Cover with fresh water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer until tender, 1½ to 3 hours. (Refer to the package directions for specific times. In general, the larger the bean, the longer the cooking time.)

Note: A heaping half cup of dried beans is equivalent to a 15.5-ounce can of beans.