

Beans



Cannellini



Spanish or Corona



Cranberry



Black-Eyed Peas

WHEN THE WIND picks up and leaves start swirling, the body starts craving satisfying dishes that get you through the chilly days and evenings. Beans are an excellent building block for protein-rich meals with minimal fuss. Their autumnal flavors are enhanced by the simple addition of fresh sage, tomatoes or some fragrant extra-virgin olive oil for dishes that are hearty without being too heavy. Beans are part of the legume family (from the Latin verb *legere*, which means “to gather”) and have been collected by human civilizations for thousands of years. When meat was scarce, beans provided an alternative source of protein in an easily stored package. Dried beans, which keep for long periods of time, retain the taste and appearance of fresh ones, while their nutritional value actually becomes more concentrated.

BEAN VARIETIES

Although favas (traditionally known as broad beans) and chickpeas were known in the ancient world (the Greeks even used them as ballot counters), many of the bean varieties used in Italian dishes were actually imported from the Americas.

Cannellini: One of the most common beans used in Italian cooking, this white legume was all but unknown in Italy until the 16th century. These beans were so prized that the Florentine queen Catherine de’ Medici was given cannellini as a present on her wedding day. They are delicately nutty in flavor and creamy in texture.

Spanish or Corona: These large white beans are related to the lima bean and owe their name to the culture that brought them back from the New World. They are large and meaty in texture and stand up well in stews.

Cranberry: These beautifully colored beans are known in Italy as *borlotti* and grow in pods with the same mottled patterns. They are used in many different soups and stews and are quite flavorful.

Black-Eyed Pea: Although we know this legume as a pea, peas and beans fall into the same category of pulses, or edible seeds that form in pods. Black-eyed peas are originally from China and are best in dishes with less liquid (they can easily become mushy). —MARIE DALBY

VENETIAN PASTA E FAGIOLI

This typical recipe from the Veneto is known as pasta e fagioli, or pasta and beans, in standard Italian.

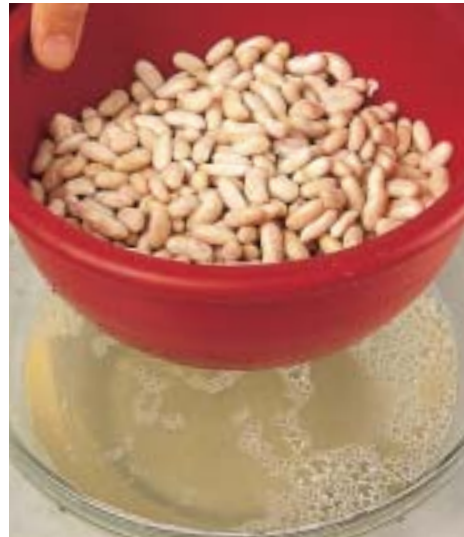
- ½ pound dried cranberry beans
- 3½ ounces pork rind, cut into 1-inch pieces (have your butcher trim the rind off of some prosciutto for you)
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 medium-sized onion, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 5 ounces short, tubular pasta
- salt and freshly ground pepper

Soak the beans in water overnight. Bring a pot of water to a boil and add the pork rind and bay leaf. Boil for 10 minutes, drain and discard the bay leaf. In a heavy-bottomed pot, place the drained beans, the pork rind and the vegetables. Add cool water to cover and bring to a simmer over medium-low heat. Cook for about 2 hours.

When the beans are cooked through, remove about ⅓ of the soup from the pot and purée in a food processor or blender. Add the purée back to the rest of the soup and mix to combine. If the soup is too thick, add enough water to reach the desired consistency. Bring back to a simmer over medium heat and add the pasta. Cook until the pasta is al dente and season with salt and pepper. Serve hot. SERVES 4



Preparing Beans



1 Dried beans need to be soaked before they're cooked—place them in a bowl and cover with room-temperature water. Let them soak for 8 to 12 hours, covered with a dish towel.

2 Drain and discard the soaking water. The amount of nutrients “lost” in the soaking water is minimal and soaking helps make beans more digestible.

3 Place soaked beans in a pot and cover with cool water. Bring to a boil and then simmer for about 2 hours, or until done. Add salt near the end of cooking or the bean's skin will toughen.

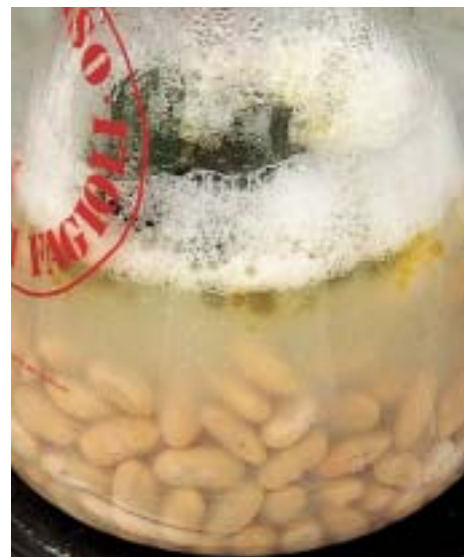
Beans Cooked in a Flask

ALTHOUGH A GLASS beaker may seem more suited for a science experiment than your dinner, cooking *fagioli al fiasco* (beans in a flask) is one of the most traditional Tuscan preparations for beans. After all, balloon-shaped Chianti wine flasks have always been easy to come by in this vineyard-rich region and make excellent cooking containers once the wine is gone.

Italians used to make this dish by tucking the bottle (stoppered with a vented cork) into the smoldering embers of their hearth fires. This way, they could leave the flasks overnight and be halfway done with the next day's meal. Slow cooking and the flask's narrow neck allow the beans to absorb the flavors of extra-virgin olive oil, sage and garlic. But since continuously stoked fires and large Chianti bottles are harder to find these days, chefs now use a heat-resistant glass beaker to recreate this aromatic recipe on their stovetops.

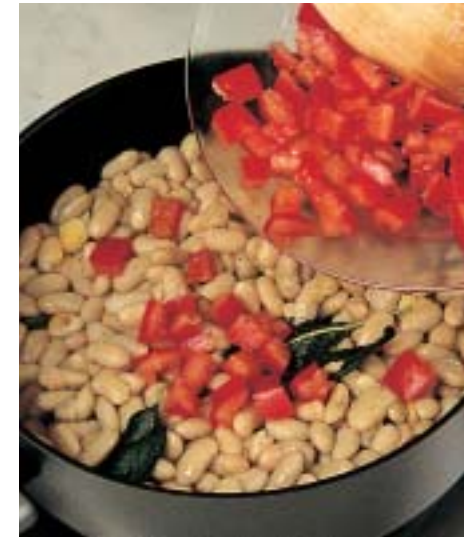


1 Soak $\frac{3}{4}$ pound cannellini beans as directed above, drain and spoon into a heat-resistant glass flask. Add water to 2 inches above top of beans, 10 leaves sage, 3 cloves garlic and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil.



2 Close flask with a vented cork. Bring to a boil and simmer over very low heat for 2 to 3 hours. The beans should absorb the liquid and become creamy and tender. Serve as a side dish. SERVES 4

“Little Bird” Beans

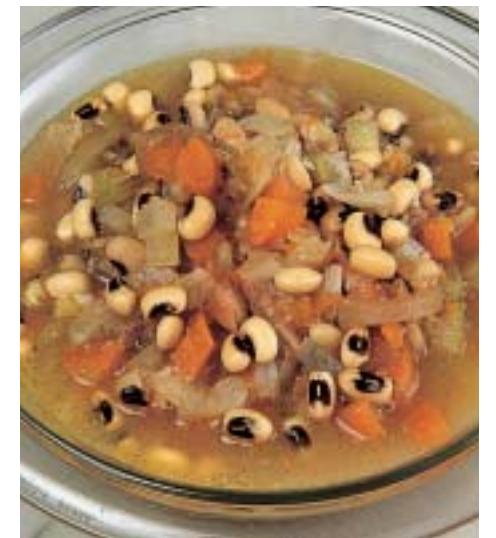
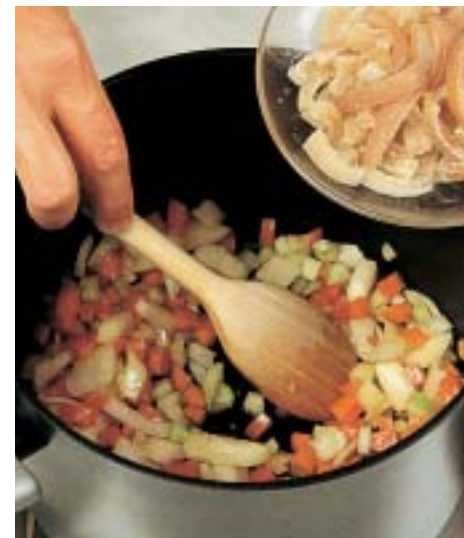


1 Soak and drain $\frac{3}{4}$ pound cannellini beans. Boil until cooked through, about 2 hours. Heat 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil in a pot, add 3 cloves garlic, halved, 10 leaves fresh sage and the beans.

2 Sauté for 2 minutes. Add 2 cups of peeled, seeded and diced tomato. Season with salt and pepper. Stir to incorporate over medium heat for about 20 minutes. Serve hot with soft polenta. SERVES 4

3 The name of this dish in Italian is *fagioli all'uccelletto*, which means “beans in the style of little birds.” The sage and garlic used for this dish are often used to season small game birds in Tuscan cuisine.

Ancient Black-Eyed Pea Soup



1 Place 2 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil in a soup pot. Sauté $\frac{1}{2}$ cup each diced onion, carrot and celery until the onion is translucent. Add 3 ounces of cubed prosciutto (or pancetta or pork rind). Cook for about 5 minutes.

2 Place about $\frac{1}{2}$ pound pre-soaked black-eyed peas in the pot. Add water or broth to cover and bring to a simmer. Cook until the black-eyed peas are tender but not mushy. SERVES 4

3 Serve this hearty soup with crusty bread and a green salad. This dish is very easy to prepare and could be dressed up with a drizzle of fruity extra-virgin olive oil.