

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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February 7, 2008

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The Incredible, Inexpensive Bean

As a child, you likely sang an unflattering song about “the magical fruit”—beans. But did you know that beans have been dubbed a “super food,” providing protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals? No beans about it—these little legumes are hearty and healthy!

Unlike many common protein sources like meats, beans are inexpensive, naturally low in fat, and free of unhealthy saturated fats and cholesterol. On average, one serving of beans also provides around 20% of your daily fiber needs, helping to keep you “regular” and feeling full. Beans contain both insoluble fiber which helps to keep your digestive tract healthy and regular, and soluble fiber which helps to reduce your cholesterol and to keep your blood sugar more stable. Beans are also bursting with vitamins and minerals like folate, potassium, iron, and magnesium. The health benefits of eating beans just keep getting better—they have recently been linked to decreased colon cancer and less heart disease in adults.

Beans can be purchased in two convenient forms—ready-to-eat in a can or dried in bags. If you are watching your sodium intake, choose the dry form and cook them yourself, since canned beans often have a lot of salt added. Bags of beans and lentils are also less expensive than canned beans, and only require a small amount of preparation before they can be used.

When you purchase a bag of dried beans, there are two easy ways to prepare them: the “leisurely” method and the “quick” method. In the “leisurely” method, simply pour the dried beans into a pot or bowl filled with water and let them sit in a refrigerator for 4 hours (or overnight). Remember to add a bit of extra water because the beans will expand during soaking. You want to be sure that they stay completely covered by water.

In the “quick” method, place the beans in a pot of water and bring them to a boil for 2 minutes. After boiling, let the beans soak in the hot water for at least 1 hour. After soaking the beans using the “leisurely” or the “quick” method, just follow the cooking directions on the package label. Even though your dried beans may be softened after soaking, they still must be cooked in order to be safe to eat. One hint: don’t add salt or tomatoes until the very end of the cooking. Both salt and acid can slow down the process and keep the beans firm.

After cooking, experiment and enjoy! Beans can be used in a variety of ways. There are several varieties to try, each with its own color, shape, flavor, and texture. Try topping your salads with beans, adding them to pasta sauce or salsa, or wrapping them up in pitas or wraps as part of a sandwich. After cooking, they can be mashed to make your own refried beans at home. You can even mix them in with ground beef to help stretch your food budget. Beans are also delicious in soups, and can be reheated with great results.

After the excitement of Super Bowl Sunday, here’s a recipe for a super-easy fifteen-bean soup using dried beans and the “leisurely” method of soaking. If you like a little more spice, add cumin, chili powder, or any other seasoning that your family prefers. If you want use 1 can of mixed veggies and 1 of your family’s favorite single vegetable. Or use a can of crushed tomatoes, Mexican or Italian style. Enjoy for good health!

Easy Fifteen-Bean Soup

1 (16 ounce) bag dry mixed beans	1 onion, chopped
1 tablespoon garlic powder	2 (15 ounce) cans mixed vegetables, drained
Water to cover	Salt and pepper to taste

Soak beans in a large bowl or pot overnight; drain. In a large pot over medium high heat, combine the beans, onion and garlic powder. Fill with water to cover and season

with a dash of salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low, and simmer for an hour. Add the mixed vegetables and continue cooking another 30 minutes or until beans are tender. (Recipe modified from Allrecipes.com) This article was written by Jennifer Faith, Dietetic Intern at James A Haley VA Hospital as part of her internship.