

COOK'S

ILLUSTRATED

BLACK BEAN SOUP

Makes About 9 Cups, Serving 6. Published January 1, 2005.

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

For a black bean soup recipe that would produce an attractive, dark-colored soup full of sweet, spicy, smoky flavors, we went with dried beans, which release flavor into the broth as they cook, unlike canned beans. Furthermore, they proved to be a time saver: We discovered that it was unnecessary to soak them overnight or to use the "quick soak method" to make them tender. We also found that we didn't need from-scratch stock for our black bean soup recipe; we maximized flavor by using a mixture of water and canned chicken broth enhanced with ham and seasonings.

Dried beans tend to cook unevenly, so be sure to taste several beans to determine their doneness in step 1. For efficiency, you can prepare the soup ingredients while the beans simmer and the garnishes while the soup simmers. Though you do not need to offer all of the garnishes listed below, do choose at least a couple; garnishes are essential for this soup as they add not only flavor but texture and color as well. Leftover soup can be refrigerated in an airtight container for 3 or 4 days; reheat it in a saucepan over medium heat until hot, stirring in additional chicken broth if it has thickened beyond your liking.

INGREDIENTS

Beans

- 1 pound dried black beans (2 cups), rinsed and picked over
- 4 ounces ham steak, trimmed of rind
- 2 bay leaves
- 5 cups water
- 1/8 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon table salt

Soup

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 large onions, chopped fine (about 3 cups)
- 1 large carrot, chopped fine (about 1/2 cup)
- 3 ribs celery, chopped fine (about 1 cup)
- 1/2 teaspoon table salt
- 5 - 6 medium cloves garlic, minced or pressed through garlic press (about 1 1/2 tablespoons)
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 1/2 tablespoons ground cumin
- 6 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 2 tablespoon water

Garnishes

2 tablespoons lime juice , from 1 to 2 limes

Lime wedges

Minced fresh cilantro leaves

Red onion , finely diced

Avocado , diced medium

Sour cream

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **FOR THE BEANS:** Place beans, ham, bay, water, and baking soda in large saucepan with tight-fitting lid. Bring to boil over medium-high heat; using large spoon, skim scum as it rises to surface. Stir in salt, reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer briskly until beans are tender, 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 hours (if necessary, add another 1 cup water and continue to simmer until beans are tender); do not drain beans. Discard bay. Remove ham steak (ham steak darkens to color of beans), cut into 1/4-inch cubes, and set aside.

2. **FOR THE SOUP:** Heat oil in 8-quart Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering but not smoking; add onions, carrot, celery, and salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are soft and lightly browned, 12 to 15 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low and add garlic, pepper flakes, and cumin; cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 3 minutes. Stir in beans, bean cooking liquid, and chicken broth. Increase heat to medium-high and bring to boil, then reduce heat to low and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, to blend flavors, about 30 minutes.

3. **TO FINISH THE SOUP:** Ladle 1 1/2 cups beans and 2 cups liquid into food processor or blender, process until smooth, and return to pot. Stir together cornstarch and water in small bowl until combined, then gradually stir about half of cornstarch mixture into soup; bring to boil over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, to fully thicken. If soup is still thinner than desired once boiling, stir remaining cornstarch mixture to recombine and gradually stir mixture into soup; return to boil to fully thicken. Off heat, stir in lime juice and reserved ham; ladle soup into bowls and serve immediately, passing garnishes separately.



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