

13-Bean Soup with Braised Pork Ribs

Ingredients

13-bean mix, dried	1 lb.	Garlic cloves	6
Braised pork ribs, picked	2 lbs.	Tomato paste	3 Tbsp.
Pork rib bones	reserved	San Marzano tomatoes, whole 28 oz. can	
Braising liquid, strained	3 cups	Dry red wine	½ cup
Chicken stock or water	6-8 cups	Bay leaves	2
Bacon fat	3 Tbsp.	Fresh thyme sprigs	4-5
Onion, medium	1	White pepper	1 tsp.
Carrots, medium	2	Kosher salt	1-2 tsp.
Celery stalks	3	Black pepper	to taste
Leeks, medium	2	Fresh spinach	6 oz.
Parsnips, medium	2	Dried parsley	2 Tbsp.

Directions

Soak **beans** overnight in cold water — Strain **braising liquid**, reserve **bones** — Pick 2 lbs. **pork** from **ribs** — Dice **onion**, **carrots**, **celery**, and **parsnips** to ½-inch — Clean and slice **leeks** into ½-inch rounds — Mince **garlic** — Hand-crush **San Marzano tomatoes** in bowl

1. The night before, rinse **beans** thoroughly and place in large bowl. Cover with cold water by 3 inches. Soak for 8-12 hours. Drain before using.
2. Strain **braising liquid**, removing spent aromatics and **peppercorns**. Reserve **rib bones** with any remaining meat attached. Pick 2 lbs. of **meat** from **ribs**, keeping pieces rustic and chunky. Set aside **meat** and **bones** separately.
3. In large Dutch oven or heavy pot (8+ quart), heat **bacon fat** over medium heat. Add diced **onion**, **carrots**, **celery**, **leeks**, and **parsnips**. Sauté for 10-12 minutes until vegetables are softened and beginning to caramelize.
4. Add minced **garlic** and cook for 1-2 minutes until fragrant. Add **tomato paste** and cook, stirring constantly, for 2-3 minutes until paste darkens and becomes fragrant.
5. Deglaze with **red wine**, scraping up any browned bits from bottom of pot. Simmer until **wine** reduces by half, about 3-4 minutes.
6. Add drained **beans**, hand-crushed **tomatoes** with juices, **braising liquid**, reserved **rib bones**, **bay leaves**, **thyme sprigs**, and **white pepper**. Add 6 cups chicken stock or water.

7. Bring to boil, then reduce to gentle simmer. Cover and cook for *2-2½ hours*, stirring occasionally, until **beans** are completely tender. Add additional **stock** or water as needed to maintain thick soup consistency.
8. Remove **rib bones** (they should be clean or nearly so). Add **picked pork** and **dried parsley**. Simmer for *10 minutes* to heat through.
9. Taste and adjust seasoning with **kosher salt** and **black pepper**. The **braising liquid** is already well-seasoned, so add **salt** conservatively.
10. Stir in **fresh spinach** and cook until just wilted, about *2-3 minutes*.
11. Remove **bay leaves** and **thyme sprigs**. Let soup rest for *10-15 minutes* before serving—it will thicken as it sits.

Equipment Required

- Dutch oven or heavy pot (8+ quart capacity)
- Large bowl (for soaking beans)
- Fine mesh strainer or colander
- Medium bowl (for crushing tomatoes)
- Sharp knife and cutting board
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Wooden spoon or sturdy spatula
- Ladle
- Storage containers (for leftovers)

Mise en Place

- Soak **beans** the night before—this is essential for even cooking and proper texture
- Strain **braising liquid** ahead of time, removing all aromatics and **peppercorns**
- Pick all **pork** from **bones** before starting; reserve **bones** separately
- Prepare all vegetables before heating pot—this ensures smooth workflow
- Have **stock** or water measured and ready; you'll add it gradually
- Hand-crush **tomatoes** in bowl before starting to cook

Ingredient Tips

- **Beans:** Overnight soaking is crucial for tender, evenly cooked beans; quick-soak methods don't work as well for this recipe
- **Braising liquid:** Already contains significant **salt**, soy sauce, and Worcestershire—taste before adding more **salt**
- **San Marzano tomatoes:** Use certified DOP if possible; hand-crushing gives better texture than pre-crushed varieties
- **Bacon fat:** Rendered bacon fat adds tremendous flavor; substitute with olive oil or butter if needed

- **Leeks:** Clean thoroughly—slice lengthwise and rinse between layers to remove sand
- **Stock:** Homemade or low-sodium **chicken stock** preferred; water works well given the rich **braising liquid**
- **Wine:** Use a dry red you'd drink; avoid "cooking wine" which contains added salt

Preparation Tips

- Take time with vegetable sauté—caramelization builds foundational sweetness and depth
- Bloom **tomato paste** until it darkens and smells sweet; this removes raw taste and concentrates flavor
- Don't rush the **wine** reduction—you want to cook off harsh alcohol while preserving acidity
- Keep **rib bones** in during bean cooking—they continue releasing gelatin for body
- Stir occasionally during long simmer to prevent sticking, but don't over-stir or **beans** will break down
- Add liquid gradually—different bean mixes and **braising liquid** concentrations affect absorption
- Test **beans** for doneness by tasting several; they should be completely tender with no chalky center
- Add **pork** near end to prevent it from becoming tough through extended simmering
- **White pepper** blooms throughout cooking for integrated heat; **black pepper** at end for fresh bite
- Add **spinach** last—it wilts quickly and loses color if overcooked
- Let soup rest before serving—flavors meld and consistency thickens naturally

Make Ahead & Storage

- This soup improves significantly overnight as flavors marry; make *1-2 days* ahead if possible
- Store in refrigerator for up to *4 days*; soup will thicken considerably when cold
- To freeze: cool completely, portion into containers, freeze up to *3 months*
- Don't add **spinach** if freezing—add fresh when reheating
- Reheat gently on stovetop, adding water or **stock** to achieve desired consistency
- Soup thickens as it sits; thin with water or **stock** when reheating
- Taste and re-season after reheating—flavors can mellow

Serving Suggestions

- Serve with crusty artisan bread, cornbread, or buttermilk biscuits for sopping
- Offer hot sauce or red pepper flakes at table for those who want heat
- Drizzle with high-quality extra virgin olive oil just before serving
- Top with grated Parmesan, Pecorino Romano, or aged cheddar
- Garnish with fresh parsley, thyme leaves, or chopped **green onions**
- Pairs beautifully with the same dry red **wine** used in cooking
- Serve with simple green salad dressed with vinaigrette to cut richness
- Makes excellent next-day lunch—flavors continue developing