

Stewed Cranberry Beans with Kale

By Marian Bull

Sautéing aromatics before adding your soaked beans makes for a pot of beans that's deep with flavor; cooking them low and slow ensures a creamy, stewed result. I like to use cranberry beans, but any other creamy bean will do. Soak them overnight in plenty of salted water, then drain before cooking. You want to make sure that, while the beans cook, the water level never drops below them; if it does, add some more liquid, preferably hot. You want your beans to be nice and soft before you add the kale in. But feel free to add extra cooking liquid to turn it into more of a soup. I like serving mine over polenta or mashed potatoes.

Serves 6 to 8

- 2 cups dried cranberry beans
 - Salted water, for soaking
 - 1/4 cup olive oil
 - 2 medium onions, roughly chopped
 - 4 to 5 cloves of garlic, chopped coarsely
 - 1 heaping teaspoon celery seed
 - 1 large pinch dried thyme
 - 1 pinch red pepper flakes
 - salt and pepper, to taste
 - 5 cups liquid (I use a mix of homemade vegetable stock and water)
 - 2 to 3 bay leaves
 - 1 carrot, peeled and snapped in half
 - 1 large head of kale, washed and chopped (roughly 2 cups)
 - Splash of wine or vermouth (optional)
1. Pick through your beans to make sure there aren't any pebbles or other debris hidden among them. Soak them in plenty of salted water overnight -- enough to cover them by at least 3 inches or so.
 2. When you're ready to cook, drain your beans. Heat a large, heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat. Add the olive oil, then once you think it's hot, add the onions. Sauté for about five minutes, then add the garlic, and let that cook for another minute or two. Add the celery seed, thyme, pepper flakes, and a big fat pinch of salt, plus a few cracks of pepper. Let cook for a few minutes, making sure the garlic doesn't burn; add the beans, and cook for a few more, to let all of the flavors start to join forces.
 3. Add the liquid, bay leaves, and carrot, and bring everything to a boil. Cover and simmer for 45 minutes to an hour, checking periodically to make sure that the liquid doesn't drop below the beans. If you're not using salted broth, you'll want to add extra salt; do so gradually, but don't be timid.
 4. To check for doneness, make sure you test at least 4 or 5 beans. Once all of them are soft, but before they completely fall apart, add the kale. At this point, the cooking liquid should have thickened from the starch of the beans. Cook it until the kale wilts, about 5 to 10 minutes. Taste for seasoning. Add a splash of wine or vermouth if you want; if you do, let it cook off for a few minutes before removing from heat.

5. Serve over polenta or mashed potatoes; leftovers reheat beautifully, but you may have to add a splash of water if they look thick or dry.