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Maine Beans

Maine Bureau of Agricultural Marketing

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LEAN AND HEARTY BEEF AND BEAN STEW

For 4-6 servings:

- 1 1/2 cups Maine Jacob's Cattle Beans (3/4 lb.)
- 3/4 to 1 lb. lean stewing beef, cut in small cubes
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- Flour
- 2 large carrots, cut in half-inch slices
- 1 large onion, peeled but left whole, stuck with 4-5 cloves
- 1 large can (28 oz.) of peeled Italian style tomatoes, chopped, with their juice
- 1 tomato can red wine (or water)
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar (optional)
- Salt to taste

Soak and drain beans as described under "Cooking Beans." Dust beef with flour and fry in mixed oil and butter until brown. Add everything else and, if necessary, add water until liquid barely shows through top of beans. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer uncovered, stirring occasionally and adding water if necessary, for about 2 hours, or until meat and beans are very tender and sauce is nicely thickened. Fish out the onion, discard cloves, chop and return to stew. Serve with biscuits or whole wheat bread or as a sauce for pasta. This recipe contains very little fat, so it's an excellent choice for those who would like to watch their weight.

DOWN EAST BEAN DIP

- 2 1/2 cups flavorful cooked beans (use baked beans, spicy soldiers, chili, or canned beans)
- 1/4 lb. lean salt pork
- About 1/2 cup liquid — beer, tomato sauce, bean-cooking liquid or broth
- 1 teaspoon chili powder or more to taste
- 1 cup shredded natural sharp cheddar cheese
- Corn chips, crisp vegetables and/or crackers, for dipping

Cut the pork into quarter-inch cubes, dump in boiling water and drain at once. In medium-sized iron skillet, fry pork over medium heat until brown and crisp. Add beans and mash into the fat. As they cook, slowly incorporate the liquid. Keep mashing, stirring and adding; in about 10 minutes you should end up with a chunky paste about the texture of thick mayonnaise. Season to taste with the chili powder and stir in the cheese shreds. Serve bubbling hot — in a fondue pot or small chafing dish if possible.

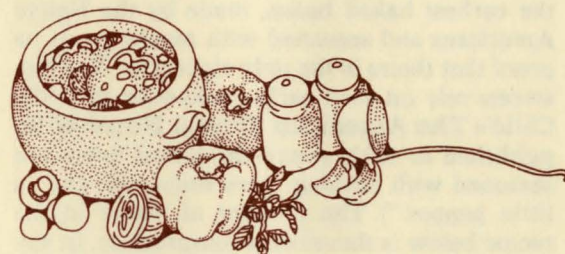
MAINELY BEAN SOUP WITH GREENS

- 1 1/2 cups Maine Yellow-Eye Beans
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 small stalks celery
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- A hambone (optional)
- 2 quarts shredded mixed greens, not more than half of them strong-flavored ones such as turnip greens, mustard or kale. Choose from these three plus dandelions, spinach, romaine lettuce, lamb's quarters, swiss chard, beet greens or other favorite
- 1/2 cup minced fresh parsley
- 1/2 cup minced fresh basil or 1 tablespoon dried basil
- 2 large garlic cloves, minced fine
- Salt to taste
- 1 to 1 1/2 cups grated parmesan cheese

Soak and drain beans as described under "Cooking Beans." Heat olive oil in your soup pot and cook celery and onion in it over medium heat until they are transparent. Add beans (and hambone) and 2 quarts cold water. Bring to boil, then reduce heat and simmer 1 hour or until beans are almost tender. Add shredded greens, in order of toughness, and cook about half an hour more, or until all greens are tender and the beans are falling apart. Stir in parsley, basil and garlic and cook about 5 minutes more. Add salt to taste and serve at once, with the cheese on the side for sprinkling. Even without the hambone, this is hearty enough to be a meal when served with crusty French bread, or fresh cornbread.

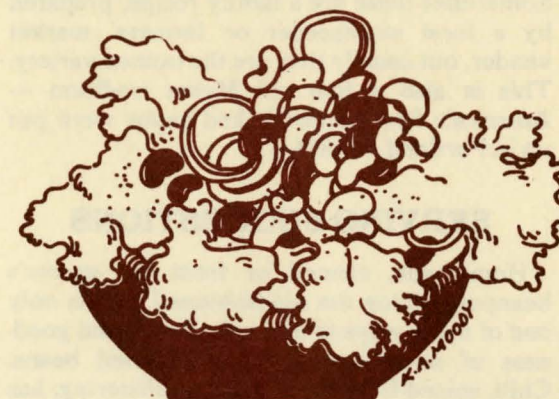
START YOUR YEAR WITH BEANS TO START IT RIGHT

Eating beans on New Year's Day is supposed to bring good luck. New Englanders do it with baked beans, while Southerners prefer red beans and rice or Hoppin' John, a bean and rice dish based on black eyed peas. In Japan, the festivities come in February on "Bean throwing day," when politicians, actors and popular sports figures toss dried beans to the waiting crowds. Hurriedly taken home, cooked and eaten, these beans are supposed to bring long life and prosperity.



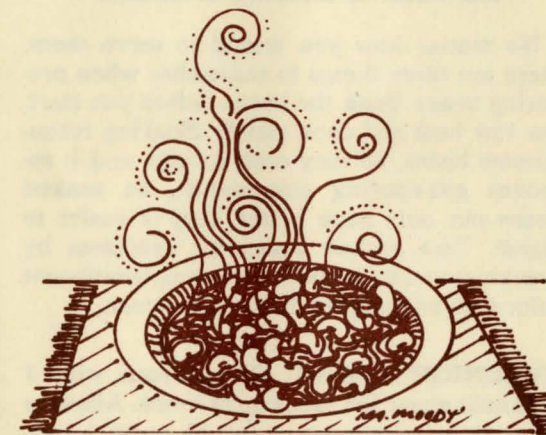
BEAN PORRIDGE, ANYONE?

On early 19th century New England farms, bean porridge was one of the original convenience foods. First, dried beans were gently stewed with plenty of meat and corn until the mixture became a heart-warming whole. Then, bowlsful were set outdoors until frozen, slipped from the molds and hung by string loops from the rafters of the kitchen shed. Slices were sawed off and reheated as needed. Considered best when slightly aged, this was a direct descendant of the "pease porridge in the pot, 9 days old," sung in the familiar nursery rhyme.



DRIED BEANS, A NUTRITIONAL BARGAIN

Though the protein they contain is not "complete" by itself, beans need only be combined with a small amount of wheat, rice, corn, meat, nuts or dairy products to provide the same kind of high-quality protein as red meat, chicken or fish. Yet beans contain almost no fat, absolutely no cholesterol and are comparatively low in calories for the amount of goodness they provide. Beans are also an excellent source of dietary fiber, B-vitamins and phosphorus.



MAINE BEANS



MAINE DRY BEANS

Hundreds of varieties of the new world bean, *phaseolus vulgaris*, grow in the United States, each region having traditional favorites best suited to local growing conditions. Many experts feel that northern climate and soil give the beans of New England a particularly fine flavor. The Maine specialties, Yellow Eye, Soldier and Jacob's Cattle beans, are all heirloom types that date from Colonial times.

Maine's native Americans were the state's first bean-lovers. They taught the colonists how to plant bean vines among the cornstalks and reap maximum nourishment from the harvest by eating succotash, beans and corn cooked together. Succotash was an Indian staple as were baked beans and corn bread. Even the native cooking method, the beanhole, was adopted by the newcomers. (A beanhole is a pit dug in the ground where a fire is burned down to coals. The coals are removed, a pot of beans put in, and coals piled back on top. Then earth is shoveled over everything and the beans are left to slowly simmer for an entire night and day.) Lumbercamp cooks made this hearty dish a specialty and to this day old timers insist that no beans, even those slowly and tenderly cooked in the woodstove, can compare with those that have spent a night in the ground.

Beanhole beans are the legacy of the forest. Beans for "Saturday night supper" is a tradition that started with the Puritans, whose Sabbath began at sundown on Saturday. Baked beans, started in the morning, provided a filling hot meal that required no further preparation. In country districts, housewives baked their own, while town-dwellers often depended on the neighborhood baker to put the beans in his oven on Saturday morning, right after the bread came out. Slowly cooked on a dying fire, they were just ready for Saturday supper.

Puritans are in short supply these days, but baked beans for Saturday night supper (and Sunday morning breakfast) are still a Maine staple.

Many Mainers no longer prepare their own beans, depending on ready-made varieties. Sometimes these are a family recipe, prepared by a local storekeeper or farmers' market vendor, but usually they are the canned variety. This is also a fine old Maine tradition — America's first canned baked beans were put up in Portland, in 1875.

SERVING SUGGESTIONS

Homemade, canned or from the grocer's beanpot, baking the old-fashioned way is only one of many ways to enjoy the flavor and goodness of nutritious, economical dried beans. Chili, spiced from mild to hot to blistering, has a growing number of partisans. Bean soup, flavored with a hambone and plenty of pepper, is so popular in the U.S. Senate dining room that there's a law against removing it from the menu. No picnic would be complete without a sweet/sour 3-bean salad and beans are also an excellent hot vegetable to serve instead of potatoes. Try them simply seasoned with butter, parsley and lemon juice or take a tip from Middle Easterners and serve them with yogurt, dill and a sprinkling of toasted sesame seeds. No matter how you serve them, they are a delicious bargain, an excellent source of vegetable protein, with half the calories of beef and no cholesterol at all.

COOKING DRIED BEANS

No matter how you intend to serve them, there are three things to remember when preparing beans. Soak the beans before you start, use low heat and cook slowly. Soaking reconstitutes beans, so they cook evenly, and it removes gas-causing compounds, so soaked beans not only taste better, they're easier to digest. Test soaked beans for readiness by breaking one. It should be an even, translucent color with no opaque white at the center.

OVERNIGHT SOAK: Cover beans with 3 cups cold water for each cup of beans. Allow to sit at room temperature for 12 to 16 hours. Drain. Refrigerate, tightly covered, if they are not to be cooked at once.

QUICK SOAK: Cover the beans with 3 cups boiling water for each cup of beans. Boil for 1 minute, then remove from heat. Allow to soak at least 1 1/2 hours, or until they are fully reconstituted.

TO COOK: Drain and measure soaked beans, then cover with 2 cups of fresh water for each cup of beans. Don't add salt until the end as it toughens the skins. Bring liquid to just below a boil and simmer, partially covered, until the beans are tender and liquid has mostly cooked away, usually 45 minutes to an hour. Stir only enough to prevent sticking.

BAKED BEANS

There are two kinds of baked bean fanciers, the Sweets and the Unsweets. (The Sweets cite the earliest baked beans, made by the Native Americans and seasoned with maple syrup, as proof that theirs is the only right way. The Unsweets rely on such early cookbooks as Lydia Child's *The American Frugal Housewife*, published in 1832, where the baked beans are seasoned with nothing more than pork and "a little pepper.") The amount of sweet in the recipe below is therefore a compromise. In any event, the most important thing is the slow cooking of the beans, preferably in a classic beanpot. This plump brown fixture, supposedly built on an ancient Assyrian model, has the narrow mouth and bulging sides which permit long, slow cooking with minimal water.

For 8-10 servings:

- 6 cups dried Maine Yellow Eye Beans
- 3/4 to 1 pound lean salt pork or slab bacon, on the rind
- 1 tablespoon dry mustard
- 1 teaspoon cracked black pepper
- 1/3 cup Maine maple syrup
- 1 medium-sized onion, peeled and stuck with 2 whole cloves.

Soak and drain beans as described under "Cooking Beans." Then cover with cold water, bring to a slow boil and cook until skins split when the beans are blown on. Drain, saving liquid. Drop the meat into a pan of boiling water, turn off heat and let sit 5 or 10

minutes to remove excess salt. Drain and cut in half.

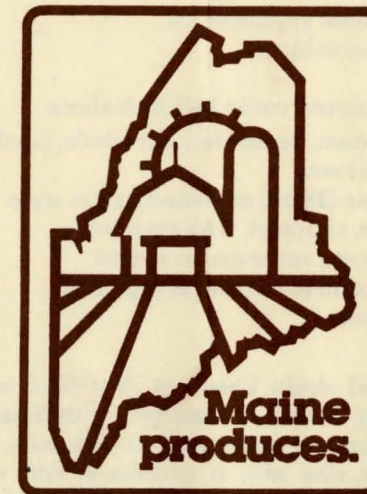
Put half of the meat, rind down, on the bottom of your beanpot. Combine 1 cup of bean-liquid with the mustard, syrup and pepper, then mix it into the parboiled beans. Transfer this to the beanpot and bury the onion right in the middle. Pour in just enough additional bean-liquid or water to barely show through the top layer of beans. Cap with the remaining meat, set rind side out. Cover and bake 6-8 hours in a very slow (250 degree) oven, adding boiling water if necessary to keep the beans from drying out. Uncover for the last hour so the top can get brown and crisp. Don't forget the brown bread to go with it.

SWEET AND SPICY SOLDIER BEANS, WITH SAUSAGE AND sour cream

For 4-6 servings:

- 1 pound Maine Soldier Beans
- 2 cups chopped onion
- 1 1/2 inch length cinnamon stick
- 1/2 to 1 pound Italian sausage, hot or sweet
- 1 large garlic clove, crushed
- The thin outer rind of an orange, grated fine
- 2 tablespoons Maine honey
- 1 teaspoon crushed chilies (or to taste)
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/4 cup rum (optional)
- Salt to taste
- 1 - 1 1/2 cups sour cream

Soak and drain the beans as described under "Cooking Beans." Chop sausage coarsely and fry until lightly browned. Combine browned sausage, with its fat, with everything else except rum and sour cream in your deep kettle or beanpot. Cover with 4 cups water, or enough to just show through the top layer of beans. Either bake or simmer very slowly, replenishing with warm water if necessary, until beans are very tender and liquid is reduced to a thick sauce, 2 or 3 hours. Add rum and salt to taste and serve in deep bowls, garnished with the sour cream. Corn tortillas make a good accompaniment.



For information on sources of Maine Beans and other quality Maine products, please contact:

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