



Eating on the Cheap: Bean Cuisine

During lean economic times, adding beans and bean dishes to your family's meals is one of the easiest, healthiest and most delicious ways to stretch your food budget.

Jeanette Nessett, RD, LDN, health promotion interventionist at Lifespan's Working Healthy Program, says, "Beans and legumes are a nutritious, inexpensive protein alternative. Adding them to your meal provides a great way to stretch your meal while saving money. They are high in fiber and easily incorporated into many recipes and dishes that you prepare with vegetables and/or grains."

The modest bean packs a lot of nutrition in a small package. As vegetarians already know, beans are storehouses of protein and a tasty substitute for meat. Paired with other low-cost foods such as rice, lentils, barley, peas and corn, beans can be prepared in an endless variety of delicious ways. Got to have meat? Even die-hard "meatarians" will find that beans are a tasty complement to many types of meat. Meat lovers can slash their meat bill by purchasing smaller, less expensive cuts of meat and using them in bean-based dishes.



Beans, for a Bounty of Benefits

Beans add benefit to any diet. In addition to being high in protein, they are rich in vitamins and minerals, high in complex carbohydrates, sodium and calories, and completely cholesterol free. Beans are one of the best sources of dietary fiber. Eating beans helps promote a healthy digestive tract and actually helps reduce the risk of some types of cancer.

Beans also store a surprising amount of calcium and potassium, helping to build bones and reduce your risk of high blood pressure and stroke. And since beans are naturally low in fat, they can help combat cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity and hypertension. Beans are an excellent weight-loss food; they will help fill you up, regulate energy and insulin

levels, and can help you feel satisfied for hours after a meal.

Beans are so nutritionally sound that they can be found in two places on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Guide Pyramid—alongside protein-packed meat, eggs, poultry and fish, and with vitamin-rich vegetables.

Don't limit your intake of healthy and delicious beans for fear of gas and bloating. If you regularly consume high-fiber foods such as beans, your body will adapt and produce fewer symptoms. You can also [cook beans in a way that will minimize gas](#).



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The Versatile Bean

Beans are as convenient and versatile as they are healthy. Beans can be used in countless main dishes, side dishes and appetizers, from burritos, casseroles, pasta dishes, stews and soups to spreads and salads. Each type of bean has a delicious flavor all its own, yet their flavors are nicely enhanced with seasonings and other recipe ingredients. Bean dishes can be prepared ahead of time and frozen and reheated in the microwave for future dinners or brown-bag lunches.



Beans are most commonly available canned or dry; either variety has its advantages. Canned beans can be used right away (after rinsing and draining) for last-minute meals. Dry beans require soaking and cooking but tend to be less expensive and a bit tastier than their canned counterparts. Many canned beans come in organic and low-sodium varieties. Hundreds of varieties of canned and dry beans can be found in your local grocery store and can be kept on hand in your cupboard.

We might as well spill the beans: inexpensive, convenient, versatile and delicious, beans are, quite possibly, one of the world's most perfect foods!

Lean 'n Mean Bean Recipe Ideas

- Try a **breakfast burrito** to start your day.
- For a light and healthy brown-bag lunch, whip up a **chick pea hummus** and pack with crackers or pita chips and baby carrots, celery or sliced cucumbers.
- Delicious spreads can be made from practically any kind of bean. Just puree in a food processor or blender and add a little oil and seasoning.
- Bring **black bean and corn wonton cups** to your next potluck.
- For a yummy appetizer, spread a thin layer of **chick pea hummus** on a flour tortilla, add chopped ham and chopped black olives. Roll it up and chill an hour, then slice into rounds, arrange on a plate and serve to guests.
- Make your next cookout a little healthier with our **heart healthy baked beans**.
- Pair **black bean, barley and greens soup** with some crusty bread for a warm and satisfying dinner on a chilly evening.
- For a colorful and nutritious main dish, try **spinach, beans and whole wheat pasta**.



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