

No-Soak Beans in the Oven

Makes about 1 quart | 5 minutes prep + 3 hours to overnight cook time

I love beans almost as much as I love cabbage (more often than not, I eat beans and cabbage - or another member of the cabbage family - together). They're delicious, and it doesn't hurt that beans might help me live longer. And while canned beans are quick and easy, cooking dried beans makes better-tasting beans. And even the most expensive dried beans (such as those from Ayers Creek Farm or Rancho Gordo) are cheaper than canned beans. A can contains the equivalent of a quarter pound of canned beans and costs about \$2, so \$6 for a pound of really good heirloom beans is a deal. And the "broth" generated by cooking dried beans is delicious; the stuff in canned beans is best rinsed off.

I started cooking beans in the oven after reading about fagiolo al fiasco, an old Tuscan technique of cooking beans in the dying ashes of the communal bread oven. This technique works with all kinds of dried beans, although some may cook faster than others, like the smaller red peas

1 cup dried beans

3 cups water

Salt

Extra virgin olive oil

Step 1 Preheat your oven to 200-255F.

Step 2 I use a ceramic bean pot, but anything with a lid that can go in the oven works. I rarely measure the beans or the water, but use roughly 3 cups of water for each cup of beans.

Step 3 Stir in a tablespoon or so of salt, add a healthy drizzle of extra virgin olive oil, and put the pot in the oven.

Step 4 It usually takes at least a few hours for the beans to rehydrate and cook to the point of tenderness. If you smell the beans cooking, take them out and check the water level. You want them covered at all times, so add a little if needed.

My old gas oven has a pilot light that keeps it warm all the time, and I'll sometimes start the beans in the evening, then turn the oven off and leave them in overnight.

I think beans cooked longer taste better, so I let mine cook for 4 or 5 hours if I have the time.

Step 5 If I want something other than plain beans, I'll usually cook them like this and add the other ingredients after they're done. But quality beans cooked with just olive oil, water, and salt are surprisingly good on their own.