

BEANS

Continued from Page 1B

Good quality dried beans have a richer flavor than canned and you can easily control the texture.

RED BEANS AND CHORIZO STEW

Prep: 25 minutes
Cook: 2 hours
Makes: 6 servings

- 1 pound dried red beans, such as Domingo Rojo
- 2 smoked ham hocks (or 4 ounces chopped smoked bacon)
- 1 3/4 teaspoons salt
- 12 ounces uncooked Mexican chorizo or spicy Italian sausage, removed from casing
- 1 medium red onion, trimmed, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 cups diced fresh mushrooms
- 1 poblano or red bell or yellow bell pepper, cored, diced
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 bag (12 ounces) frozen cut okra
- Chopped fresh cilantro
- Red jasmine rice, optional

1. Rinse beans well and pick

through them for stones. Put beans into a large (4 to 6 quart) Dutch oven or deep saucepan. Add cold water to cover by 2 inches. Heat to a boil, then remove from heat and let stand 1 hour.

2. Add water if needed so beans are covered by 2 inches. Add ham hocks. Heat to a boil, then reduce heat to very low. Partly cover the pan and let simmer, stirring often and adding water as needed to always keep beans covered by at least 1 inch. Cook until the beans are tender to the bite (you'll need to taste them), usually 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Add 1 teaspoon of the salt and simmer 10 more minutes. At this point you can refrigerate the beans for several days in their liquid. Remove the hocks and pull the meat off the bones and chop it finely and reserve.

3. Meanwhile, put chorizo and onion into a large, deep saucepan or deep skillet. Set over medium heat. Cook and stir to break up the chorizo until golden, about 10 minutes. Stir in garlic; cook 1 minute. Stir in mushrooms, pepper and chili powder.

4. Strain beans over a bowl to catch their liquid. Stir 3 cups of the drained beans, 1 cup of the bean cooking liquid, the

chopped ham hock meat and the okra into the chorizo. (Save remaining beans for another use.) Simmer, partly covered, over medium heat about 10 minutes. Season to taste with the remaining 3/4 teaspoon salt. Serve in wide bowls topped with rice and cilantro.

RED JASMINE RICE

Prep: 10 minutes
Cook: 20 minutes
Makes: 6 servings

- 2 cups white jasmine rice
- 2 2/3 cups red bean cooking water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- Chopped fresh herbs for garnish

1. Put rice, bean water, salt and garlic into a rice cooker. Cook according to manufacturer's directions until rice is tender.

2. Let stand 10 minutes. Fluff with fork. Serve garnished with fresh herbs.

PINTO BEANS AND GREENS

Prep: 15 minutes
Soak: 1 hour
Cook: 2 hours

Makes: 8 servings

- 1 pound dried pinto beans or yellow eye beans
- 2 to 4 tablespoons bacon fat or olive oil
- 2 large cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 large sprig fresh sage or thyme (or 1/4 teaspoon dried) Salt
- 3 to 4 cups loosely packed, chopped or thinly sliced kale
- Red pepper hot sauce

1. Rinse beans well and pick through them for stones. Put beans into a large (4 to 6 quart) Dutch oven or deep saucepan. Add cold water to cover by 2 inches. Heat to a boil, then remove from heat and let stand 1 hour.

2. Add water if needed so beans are covered by 2 inches. Add bacon fat, garlic and herb sprig. Heat to a boil, then reduce heat to very low. Partly cover the pan and let simmer, stirring often and add water as needed to always keep beans covered by at least an inch. Cook until the beans are tender to the bite (you'll need to taste them), usually 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Add 1 teaspoon salt and simmer 10 more minutes. At this point you can refrigerate the beans for several days in their

liquid.

3. Reheat beans if necessary. Use a potato masher to lightly crush a few of the beans; usually 3 or 4 mashes does it.

Taste and adjust seasoning with salt. Stir in the kale and simmer until it is tender, about 10 minutes. Serve hot in bowls with plenty of hot sauce.

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TIPS

Continued from Page 1B

The gel that forms swells by absorbing 30 grams of water for each gram of the crystals. The water is captured in the net like a net full of fish, to be released and used by the little feeder roots of plants that tend to grow into the net.

It is important when using the polymer to reconstitute it before using it. If you use the dry crystals, then water it, you will end up with the crystals absorbing all the water and the soil mix and polymer overflowing whatever container

you have it in — including the hole you dug in the yard for the tree you just planted.

So be advised to hydrate the crystals before use to avoid unwelcome surprises. Soil polymer is useful in hanging baskets, in planting trees, in houseplants. I don't depend on the polymer to keep plants hydrated, but it is very useful to prevent the plant from becoming stressed.

Chores and Tips

- For best bloom later this winter, Christmas cactus, potted azaleas and kalanchoe may be left outdoors until night temperatures drop to

about 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

- Transplant deciduous trees once they have dropped their leaves.

- Fertilize trees following soil test guidelines.
- Plant tulips now.
- Wait to dig cannas and dahlias until after frost nips their foliage. Then allow the plants to dry under cover in an airy, frost-free place before storage.

- Pick pears before they are fully mature. Store in a cool, dark basement to ripen.

- Harvest herbs now to freeze or dry for winter use.

- Pinch out the top of Brussels sprouts plants to plump out the developing sprouts.

- Newly seeded lawns should not be cut until they are at least 2 or 3 inches tall.

- Autumn is a good time to add manure, compost, or leaf mold to garden soils for increasing organic matter content.

• Seasonal loss of inner needles on conifers is normal at this time.

It may be especially noticeable on pines.

If you have garden questions or comments, please write to greengardencolumn@yahoo.com

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DORY

Continued from Page 1B

I had to have my car license renewed on this special day and was helped by a very nice young man, John E. Brown, who it turned out was celebrating his birthday on Sept. 10 as was I and anyone else who had the same need of license renewal. His attitude made a potentially nervous time less stressful and we all laughed when he said I was good now until my 100th birthday.

In attending a meeting later in the day, the idea of a September birthday expanded from my own family to others as a young lady, Kathryn, admitted her special day was coming up the very next day and she was keeping it free for the happiness it would bring as being special in its own way.

Then an unplanned dinner out with friends came about as we drove back to town, my secret unknown to them, which made it even more special at its happening.

As morning came about and my day became part of the past along with others who observed that particular date, I knew that Kathryn and others were awaking to their own amazement of reaching another milestone called life. As for myself, my birthday hadn't yet ended by a week later when special gifts arrived with cards and lunch out. Every day seems to be my birthday as it comes and goes in each 24 hours. How fortunate I am.

How we each look upon it as a planned or unplanned event writes the story of our life, and therein I blessed the link of thoughts and those who had brought me so far along in life that I could see that a Happy Birthday begins and ends with your own perspective.

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