

HEARTY

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Natural gas-producing sugars from the beans are leached out into the water and so it is best to get rid of the liquid.

When cooking dried beans with thicker skins, I also add a pinch of baking soda to soften them.

However I don't presoak the split yellow mung, brown or orange-hued lentils and don't always soak black-eyed peas either.

Once you have the beans softened to your liking, use them in any aspect of a meal. When mashed, beans can be made into dips like hummus or become the backbone for a burger patty. Refried beans can add flavorful weight to burritos or be spread over toast.

Rice dishes, pastas and cassoulets are studded with black-eyed peas, cannellini beans, kidney beans and black beans and so are salads with pinto beans, chickpeas and white beans. Even desserts embrace beans. Little red ones often show up in Malaysian shaved ice, Japanese honeyed pancakes, moon cakes and Chinese rice and coconut puddings.

Then there are the soups, which speak in global accents and especially embraced during these wicked cold days. Beans are reliable team players that remind you of the Campbell jingle, "M'm! M'm! Good!"

For many Italian-Americans in Pittsburgh, you understand them better when you understand greens and beans. The one-pot favorite is traditionally made with cannellini beans and the greens vary from escarole to kale to spinach to a blend.

Cannellini beans again speak loud and clear in a fasolada (Greek white bean soup) without over dominating. A punchy green curry soup with black beans is the kind of soup that makes winter bearable. Red kidney beans add heft and texture to a steaming bowl of tortilla soup.

That's why we say cool beans to winter soups.

FASOLADA

Don't disregard the direction to mash 1 cup of cannellini beans when making this Greek white bean soup. The mashed beans not only thicken the soup but also give it a desired creamy texture.

4 (15.5-ounce) cans cannellini beans, rinsed



Green curry soup with black beans, broccoli, and bell peppers.

Emily Matthews/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette-TNS



Tortilla soup with red kidney beans.

Emily Matthews/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette-TNS

and drained, divided
6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided, plus more to serve
1 large red onion, chopped
3 medium celery stalks, chopped
3 medium carrots, peeled and chopped
Kosher salt
4 medium garlic cloves, minced
1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
3 tablespoons tomato paste
1 1/2 quarts low-sodium chicken broth

4 teaspoons red wine vinegar
Black pepper to taste
1/2 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1/4 cup pitted Kalamata olives, chopped
1/2 cup feta cheese, crumbled

In a medium bowl, add 1 cup of beans. Mash with a fork or potato masher to a paste.

In a large pot over medium heat, add 3 tablespoons of the oil and heat until shimmering.

Add onion, celery and carrots and 1/2 teaspoon salt. Cook until vegetables begin to

brown, about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add garlic and red pepper flakes and stir until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

Add the tomato paste and cook, stirring, until the paste begins to brown, about 2 minutes.

Stir in the remaining canned beans along with the mashed beans. Add chicken broth and bring to a simmer over medium-high heat.

Then reduce heat to medium-low, cover pot and cook until carrots are just tender, about 20 minutes.

Turn heat off and stir in vinegar. Then vigorously whisk in the remaining 3 tablespoons of oil.

Season with salt and pepper to taste. Ladle into bowls and

top with parsley, olives and feta.

Makes 6 servings.

— Christopher Kimball's Milk Street Magazine (2018)

RED BEAN TORTILLA SOUP

I used juicy Campari tomatoes here because they are naturally sweet, but any juicy variety will work. To add color, I cut spinach and jalapeno-cheddar wraps into strips and bake them to stand in for the tortilla.

1 cup dried red kidney beans
Coarse kosher salt, divided
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 large white onion, thinly sliced
3 garlic cloves, minced
3 tablespoons fresh cilantro, minced, plus more for garnish
4 cups Campari tomatoes, diced
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 1/2 teaspoons cayenne pepper
4 cups chicken or vegetable broth
2 large tortillas (spinach and jalapeno-cheddar) cut into strips
Diced avocado for garnish
Sour cream for garnish (optional)

Soak kidney beans in water for about 5 hours. Change the water at least 3 or 4 times. Rinse the beans and drain the water. In a heavy pot, cook beans with 3 cups of water, a little salt and baking soda, over medium heat, uncovered, for 20 minutes.

In a heavy pot over medium heat, warm the oil. Add onion and saute until just tender. Add

garlic and cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Add cilantro and turn off heat and let the aromatics cool in the pot for about 10 minutes.

Add the aromatics and tomatoes to a blender and puree until smooth. Transfer the mixture back to the pot, over medium heat. Add cumin and cayenne and stir well. Add cooked beans and broth. Then add salt to taste. Once the soup comes to a boil, turn heat down to medium-low. Cover and cook for 25 minutes, stirring occasionally. If the soup is too thick, add more broth.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 250 degrees. Line a baking sheet with foil.

Place tortilla strips on the sheet and spritz them with cooking spray. Then sprinkle some salt on top. Bake for 10 minutes or until the strips are crisp, rotating the sheet halfway through and stirring occasionally. Remove from the sheet and let tortilla strips cool.

Ladle soup into 6 bowls. Garnish with tortilla strips, avocado, cilantro and sour cream, if desired..

Serves 6.

— Arthi Subramaniam

GREEN CURRY SOUP WITH BLACK BEANS

This soup has all the qualities that distinguish a good green curry: It's creamy but not overbearing, elegantly fiery and soothing.

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
2 large garlic cloves, finely minced
1 tablespoon fresh ginger, peeled and finely minced
1 cup small broccoli florets
1 cup yellow bell pepper, thinly sliced
1 cup orange bell pepper, thinly sliced
1 can (13.5 ounces) unsweetened coconut milk
2 cups water
2 1/2 tablespoons green curry paste, store bought
Kosher salt to taste
2 cans (15.5 ounces) black beans, rinsed and drained
2 teaspoons freshly squeezed lime juice
Cilantro for garnish, optional

Heat oil in a large saucepan. Saute the garlic and ginger until fragrant, about 1 minute.

Add the broccoli, yellow and red pepper slices, coconut milk, water and curry paste. Add salt to taste. Stir together and bring to a boil.

Reduce heat to medium-low. Stir in black beans and let it all simmer for 10 to 15 minutes.

Add lime juice, stir and turn the heat off. Garnish with cilantro, if desired.

Serves 5.

Getting greens into your meals as spring approaches

Gretchen McKay
 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Have you been feeling a little cooped lately up with all the crummy weather? Me, too, and I'm guessing that's why I've been obsessed with adding fresh, leafy greens to every meal for the past couple of weeks.

Greens speak of spring, and spring in turn means warmer weather. Also, don't we all need to eat more vegetables?

If you'd rather work fresh greens into a cheesy entree, this easy pasta dish should hit the spot. It features fresh spinach mixed with a trio of Italian cheeses that is then stuffed into oversized pasta shells, with a generous amount of marinara on top and bottom to make it saucy. It's easy,

nutritious and super filling.

I used a type of conchiglioni rigati (Italian for seashell) from the Pennsylvania Macaroni Co. in the Strip District. The luxe Pastificio Di Martino brand is a bit more expensive than the jumbo-sized shells found in traditional grocery stores, but worth it. I also took the shortcut of using jarred marinara sauce instead of making my own, because I wanted dinner on the table as fast and efficiently as possible.

This recipe makes enough filling for two small or one large pan of shells. For an easy make-ahead-meal, stick one in the freezer, wrapped tightly in plastic and again with foil, for later.

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