

## The Register-Guard: *Entree: Entree*

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simple solutions HHHH

### Magic beans

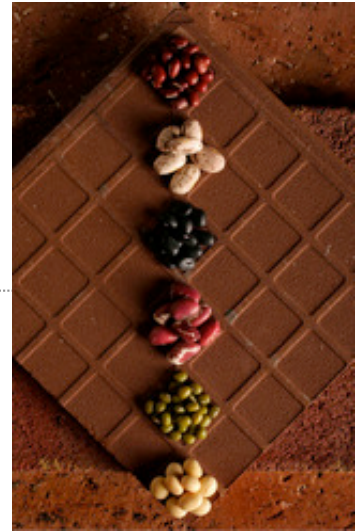
By Jennifer Snelling

For The Register-Guard

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When I ask my 4-year-old which restaurant she wants to go to, there's never any doubt what her answer will be. It's not McDonald's for a Happy Meal. It's to CaféYumm! for a bowl of rice and beans with olives and sauce. I have to admit that this makes me rather proud and, as a result, I've started cooking a lot more beans at home.



I have to admit that I initially thought of beans as rather, um, dull. But now that the rich foods and overindulgences of the holiday season have passed, I find myself longing for more simple and wholesome fare. What is simpler and more wholesome than beans? A lean source of protein that's easy on the waistline and on the wallet, beans are anything but dull. How could anything with names such as "eye of the goat," "scarlet runner" and "Christmas lima" be dull?

"I've been studying beans for 12 years," says Mark Beauchamp, who owns the Café Yumm! restaurants with his wife, Mary Ann Beachamp. Café Yumm! specializes in bean and rice dishes. "It's like delving into herbs, wine or cheese. There are so many different varieties of beans. They are found on every continent except Antarctica. Just about every culture eats beans. They're connected with various celebrations and rituals all over the world."

Beauchamp points out that beans eaten with brown rice are a complete protein, making a perfect low-fat, yet hearty, meal.

Of course, canned beans are everywhere in all the varieties that are most commonly eaten. Is it worth the extra time and effort to prepare dried beans?

There are many reasons to choose dried beans, Beachamp says. Cooking dried beans allows the cook to control what's in them. Most canned beans contain high amounts of sodium, and often other flavorings. Rinsing the beans before serving can help remove some of the sodium, but not all.

There also have been recent concerns about canned foods, because of the chemical bisphenol A (BPA) that is found in the plastic liner in many aluminum cans. The chemical can disrupt the hormonal system, but scientists differ on whether the very low doses found in food and beverage containers can be harmful. Some Canadian

stores have pulled Nalgene bottles, which contain BPA, off the shelves for further testing. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration says that BPA-based products do not pose a health risk.

From a cook's perspective, Mary Ann Beauchamp says she would always choose dried beans over canned.

"You get a much superior product," she argues. When cooked correctly, dried beans tend to be a little "toothsome" rather than a can of mush, like most canned beans. Besides being healthier and tastier, there is an amazing array of heirloom beans available dried. Some of the best-tasting beans are heirloom varieties that are not available in cans.

Here's a list of the basic types of beans and some of their more unusual varieties:

Cannellini beans are small white beans that are mild-flavored and used in many Italian and French dishes. Other white beans include haricots blancs, white runner beans, European soldiers, great Northerns, navys and tiny rice beans.

Cranberry beans are light reddish brown with speckles. They are full-flavored and used in hearty Italian fare. Other similar varieties include bortlotti, eye of the goat and tongue of fire.

Flageolet beans are small, light green beans with a fresh taste. These are used commonly in French cuisine.

Lima beans can be eaten fresh or dried. One of the prettiest varieties is the huge brown-and-pink speckled Christmas lima.

Pinto beans are staples of Mexican cuisine. Some of their more unusual varieties include flor de mayo, flor de junio and rattlesnake beans.

Black beans are the mainstay for Latin American and Caribbean cuisines. They have a wonderful earthy flavor, but they often take longer to cook than other beans.

Lentils are not true beans. They belong to another species of dried legume and come in many colors. They cook quickly and don't need to be soaked.

Black-eyed peas and their cousins crowder peas are popular in classic Southern dishes. Many households in the South have black-eyed peas and collard greens on New Year's Day to bring good luck in the coming year.

Chickpeas or garbonzo beans are hard and dense and take longer to cook, but are wonderful in many Mediterranean dishes.

There's no denying that canned beans are convenient, and probably fine in a pinch. But the Beauchamps argue that cooking dried beans is really not that much of a hassle.

"All it takes is a little bit of planning," Mark says. "It certainly takes hours, but not

hours of your time. They just sit on your counter. Then, they cook 45 minutes or so, but you don't need to tend to them much.”

Most dried beans call for being soaked overnight in about three times as much water as beans. But if you forget to start the night before, there is a method of “quick soaking” that often results in a better final product. To quick soak beans, put the beans and water in a pot. Bring the pot just to a boil, then turn it off. Let the beans soak for 3 to 4 hours, then drain the water and cook as you normally would. If you have a pressure cooker, beans can be cooked without any soaking.

Another way to make dried beans more convenient is to cook more than you will need for your recipe and freeze the remainder in small portions. This works well for families with children, who seem to love the bite-sized pieces of protein. Just take them out the night before to defrost in the refrigerator.

Canned beans may be convenient, but they don't come with the benefit of the cozy smell of beans cooking on the stove when you get home.

“Beans are so easy to cook and they become a base for so many things — sauces, spices, salsa and grated cheese, salads,” Mark Beauchamp says. “They're so simple and elegant and can be added to just about anything.”

I know at least one little girl who thinks beans, rice, olives and Yumm! Sauce make the perfect happy meal.

### White Beans With Rosemary and Garlic

Serve as a side dish with pork chops or on top of toasted French bread.

1 cup dried white beans (cannellini, white runner, great Northern or other)

Salt, to taste

¼cup extra-virgin olive oil

4 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped

1 teaspoon coarsely chopped rosemary leaves

Soak beans overnight in 4 cups of water. Drain and transfer to a heavy pot. Add water to cover by 2 inches. Bring to a boil. Lower the heat and skim off any foam. Simmer gently for 2 hours or so, until the beans are tender. Add more water if necessary during the cooking. Season to taste with the salt.

In a heavy-bottomed saucepan or skillet, warm the olive oil over low heat. Add the garlic and rosemary. Cook just until the garlic is soft, about 2 minutes. Stir into the beans, taste for salt, and adjust as needed. This dish gets better as it sits and the flavors marry.

## Scarlet Runners and New Potatoes

For an alternative, serve the beans and dressing over your favorite rice instead of potatoes. Or, if you don't have scarlet runner beans, substitute giant white beans.

1 cup dried scarlet runner beans

8 small new potatoes

6 tablespoons olive oil

3 garlic cloves, minced

3 tablespoons Oriental sesame oil

Prepare beans: Rinse and pick over beans. Place beans in a saucepan and cover with at least 2 inches of water. Leave beans to soak for at least 4 hours. (Alternatively, if you are in a hurry, you can pour boiling water over the beans to cover by 2 inches, cover and leave for 1 hour.) Drain beans and dispose of the rinse water. Rinse drained beans. Add 3 cups of cold water to beans. Bring to a boil and simmer for 1½ hours or until tender, not mushy. Carefully drain beans.

Prepare potatoes: Rinse and clean potatoes. Place in a saucepan with enough water to cover potatoes. Boil potatoes for 20 minutes or until tender. Halve or quarter, depending on size, and mix with beans.

Prepare dressing: Mix olive oil, garlic and sesame oil. Pour dressing over potatoes and beans. Toss until well coated. Serve hot or at room temperature. Serves 6.

Source: Mark Beauchamp.

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Jennifer Snelling is a free-lance writer from Eugene.

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