02 - Cooking Pinto & Black Beans

Pinto beans are the primary protein source in this plan. Black beans are interchangeable with pintos in every recipe and method on this page — swap freely based on what you have.

What You Need

- Dried pinto or black beans
- Water
- A pot with a lid
- Salt
- Heat source
- A bowl or container for soaking

Water Requirements

Amount Dry	Soak Water	Cook Water	Yield Cooked
1/2 cup	Enough to cover by 2 inches	2 cups	~1.5 cups
1 cup	Enough to cover by 2 inches	4 cups	~3 cups
2 cups	Enough to cover by 2 inches	8 cups	~6 cups

> **Water saving tip:** The water you cook beans in is nutritious broth. If water is limited, do not discard it — use it as a soup base or drink it.

Step 1 — Soak

Cover beans in cold water by at least 2 inches. Soak for 8 to 12 hours, or overnight.

- Soaking cuts cooking time roughly in half
- Soaking makes beans easier to digest
- If you cannot soak, add 30 to 45 extra minutes of cooking time and check frequently

> **Black beans vs pintos:** Black beans may run slightly darker water during soaking — this is normal. Drain and rinse before cooking regardless of bean type.

Step 2 — Cook

1. Drain soaking water and discard
2. Add beans to pot with fresh water — roughly 2 cups water per half cup dry beans
3. Bring to a full boil
4. Reduce to a low steady simmer
5. Cover with a lid
6. Cook 60 to 90 minutes, checking occasionally and adding water if the level drops below the beans
7. Beans are done when they are completely soft all the way through — no hard center
8. Add salt in the last 10 minutes of cooking — adding it earlier toughens the skin

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Adding Fat

Add one tablespoon of tallow or other cooking fat per person during the last 15 minutes of cooking. Stir it in and let it melt through the beans. This adds the dietary fat your body needs and significantly improves the flavor and mouthfeel of the finished beans.

Alternatively heat the fat separately and pour it over the beans when serving.

[ADD-INS]

Add any of the following if available. None of these are required — the beans are complete without them.

Add early (with the beans at the start of cooking):

- Garlic cloves, whole or lightly crushed — highest impact add-in for flavor
- Any root vegetables such as carrot, sweet potato, or potato — they need the full cook time
- A bay leaf if available — remove before serving
- Dried chili or hot pepper — a small amount goes a long way

Add in the last 10 minutes:

- Green onion tops, chopped
- Fresh or dried oregano, cumin, or thyme
- Tomato, chopped — adds acid that brightens the whole pot

Add after cooking, stirred in or on top:

- Fresh kale, chard, or spinach from the garden — the residual heat wilts it in about 2 minutes
- Fresh green onion
- Any fresh herb you have

Fuel Saving Tips

- A tight lid is essential — it traps steam and cuts cook time significantly
- Once the beans are simmering steadily, the lowest possible flame that maintains a gentle bubble is enough
- **Retained heat method:** Bring beans to a full boil for 10 minutes, then wrap the entire covered pot tightly in a blanket, sleeping bag, or jacket. Let sit for 2 to 3 hours. The trapped heat finishes the cooking with zero additional fuel. Check for doneness before serving.
- Cook a large batch once per day rather than smaller amounts twice — one long burn is more efficient than two short ones

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Batch Cooking Reference

Beans keep well after cooking. Cook a full day's supply at once.

Dry Beans	Feeds (per meal)	Cook Time
1 cup	2 people	60–90 min
2 cups	4 people	60–90 min
3 cups	6 people	60–90 min

> Cooked beans can be eaten at room temperature if reheating fuel is not available.

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