Vegetables and Fruits for Health:
Preparing Dry Beans, Peas, and Lentils

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.Preparation – Soaking Beans

Clean your cooking area and wash your hands before you start preparing beans. Spread dry beans on a clean paper towel or kitchen towel to remove small stones, dirt, and damaged or shriveled beans before cooking. Place beans in a strainer and rinse several times under cold running water. Once beans have been sorted and rinsed, they must be soaked before cooking (lentils, split peas, and black-eyed peas do not require soaking) using one of the three methods from Table 1 for one pound (2 cups) of rinsed, dry beans.

Preparation – Cooking

After the beans have soaked, you will need to cook them so they become tender to use in recipes. Cook the beans using one of the three methods: stovetop, slow cooker, or electric pressure cooker.

Stovetop

1. Place beans in a large stock pot and cover with fresh, cold water. You can also add 1 to 2 tablespoons of oil if you wish. Adding oil prevents foaming and boiling over. Foam can also be skimmed off during cooking.
2. Place over medium heat; keep cooking water at a gentle simmer to prevent split skins.
3. Since beans expand as they cook, add warm water periodically during the cooking process to keep the beans covered.
4. Gently stir beans occasionally throughout the cooking process to prevent sticking.
5. Depending on the variety, beans take 30 minutes to 2 hours to cook. They should be tender but not mushy.
6. Drain beans immediately after they have reached the desired texture to prevent overcooking.

Start checking the doneness of the beans after about one hour. When cooking, add herbs and spices as desired for added flavor. Do not add acidic ingredients (such as tomatoes) to beans during cooking as it will slow the cooking process. Add salt when beans are almost tender at the end of their cooking time. Adding salt too early in the cooking process can toughen the beans.

Slow Cooker

1. Place the beans in the slow cooker and add enough water to cover them plus two inches. If you're using one pound of beans or less, a 3 1/2-quart cooker is sufficient. For two pounds of beans, use a 5-quart cooker. Keep in mind that the beans will expand to twice their volume during cooking.
2. If desired, you can also include ingredients like quartered onions or whole garlic cloves by placing them on top of the beans.
3. Cook the beans on the low setting of your slow cooker until they become tender. Depending on their size, the cooking time will vary between 3 and 6 hours.

Note: Red kidney beans should be boiled on the stovetop for at least 10 minutes before adding to the slow cooker. This step assures that kidney beans are fully cooked. Undercooked red kidney beans contain a high concentration of a compound that can cause sickness. Other types of dried beans contain the compound but in lower concentrations.

Electric Pressure Cooker

If using an electric pressure cooker, you do not need to soak beans. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cooking.

Table 1: Bean Soaking Methods

Method	Instructions	Advantages	Disadvantages
Overnight Soak	1. In a large pot, cover rinsed beans with cold water. 2. Cover, refrigerate, and soak for 6 to 8 hours or overnight. 3. Drain beans and discard soak water. 4. Rinse beans with fresh, cool water.	• No boiling required. • Reduces gas-producing compounds with a long soak.	• Long soaking time. • Requires planning ahead.
Quick Soak	1. Place rinsed beans in a large pot and add 6 cups of cold water. 2. Cover, bring to a boil, and boil for 3 minutes. 3. Remove from heat, cover, refrigerate, and soak for 1 hour. 4. Drain beans and discard soak water. 5. Rinse beans with fresh, cool water.	• Much faster soaking time. • Requires less planning.	• Fermentation may occur if beans sit in hot water too long.
Hot Soak	1. Place rinsed beans in a large pot and add 10 cups of water. 2. Heat to boiling and boil for 3 minutes. 3. Remove from heat, cover, and refrigerate for 4 to 24 hours. 4. Drain beans and discard soak water. 5. Rinse beans with fresh, cool water.	• Reduces cooking time. • Reduces gas-producing compounds. • Yields consistently tender beans.	• Long soaking time. • Requires some planning.