



## Beans: A Great Pantry Staple

By Diane Whitten

On a recent trip to the grocery store I found the dry bean aisle to be nearly wiped out. Beans are a great staple pantry item for those wanting to stock-up in case of an emergency because they have a long storage life. It's best to use beans within a year of purchase, but that's only because the longer they sit on the shelf, the longer they take to cook. They are still safe to use, and if you store beans properly, they should be good for several years in your pantry.



To keep dried beans as fresh as possible, store them in food-safe storage containers with tight-fitting lids rather than in the plastic bag you purchased them in. Store in a cool, dry place out of direct sunlight. If beans have been sitting on the shelf for more than a year, adding  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon of baking soda to each pound of beans while you're cooking them can help make them softer.

If you're not familiar with cooking dried beans, it's worth reading a few tips. It's not difficult to cook dry beans so they are properly hydrated and tender. If you pay attention to just a few fine points, you'll have perfectly creamy beans every time. An excellent web resource is the Bean Institute, <https://beaninstitute.com> for information on cooking, recipes, nutrition, and descriptions of all the different beans.

**Soaking:** You don't have to pre-soak beans, but you should, they will cook faster and more evenly. When it comes to rehydrating, you have options.

Do a **quick soak** if you're in a hurry or forgot to soak the beans the night before. Bring 6 cups cold water to a boil. Add 2 cups dry beans. Boil 2 to 3 minutes, then cover, remove from the heat, and let stand 1 hour.

### Best Method

Do a **hot soak** to minimize the eventual cooking time. Bring 10 cups cold water to a boil. Add 2 cups dry beans. Boil 2 to 3 minutes, then cover, remove from the heat, and let stand 4 to 16 hours at room temperature.

Do a **cold soak** to retain maximum color and flavor. Put 2 cups dry beans in 6 cups cold water and let soak at room temperature for 8 to 16 hours. (Any longer and beans may start to sprout.) You can cold-soak beans in the refrigerator up to 5 days.

### Discard soaking water?

If you toss the soaking water, you discard some of the beans' vitamins and minerals, but not much. (All the protein and carbohydrate remain.) On the plus side, draining the soaking water minimizes the gassiness factor because some of the beans' indigestible sugars are dissolved in that water.

### Avoid hard water

Dry beans soften slowly in hard water (water with a high calcium content). If you have hard water, cook the beans in bottled water, or pre-soak them longer.