

clover food lab

This colorful bean print hangs proudly in Kiernan's home kitchen, a source of daily cooking inspiration.



Kiernan here. Who can tell me who said the quote in the subject line?

Here's a hint: she too was a type of monster—though not a Veggie Monster. She had a British accent. And she was a little all over the place—she also wanted "pink macaroons and a million balloons and performing baboons."

It was, of course, the inimitable Veruca Salt from "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" and she won my heart by demanding, of all things, a bean feast. I too want a BEAN FEAST! And I want you all to have frequent BEAN FEASTS!

(An aside: a little research reveals that the [British bean feast](#) that sweet little Veruca was shouting about probably referred to a festive dinner that an employer throws for its employees, but the deeper origins tell of a "hidden bean" that was used to name a "Bean King." That's my sort of dinner and my sort of crown.)

Learning how to make beans and where to buy fun interesting varieties of them changed the way I cook and made veggie-focused meal planning so much easier. Beans are filling, packed with protein and fiber, and low on saturated fats and cholesterol. They can stand up as the hero vegetable in any soup, stew, or salad and they leave everyone feeling satisfied.

Cooking dried beans is pure alchemy: they start as beautiful little rocks that, with a little heat, a little seasoning, and a little time become perfect silky little flavor pods ready to buddy up with other veggies and sauces. Even their names are magical: Cannellini! Yellow Eye! GARBANZO!

So that's what I want to do today: give you a few tips on how to cook dried beans to perfection and how to find some interesting varieties you can play with and try out.

Cooking Dried Beans

Cooking dried beans is pretty straightforward, though like anything there are controversies.

Here's the most basic method:

- Wash the beans thoroughly using a colander
- Soak the beans for a few hours (if you have time. I wouldn't soak for more than 12 hours, and no soak just means they'll need to simmer for a touch longer.)
- Drain the beans and place them in a relatively deep pot or Dutch oven
- Fill the pot with water so it's about 2-3 inches above the beans and they look glimmery and glassy down there
- Place on the stovetop and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Let the beans boil for 10 minutes (if you really want to get the party started) or immediately lower the heat to allow the beans to simmer. Skim off and throw away any foam that rises to the top of the pot.
- Simmer the beans in the water—making sure they bubble up slowly but steadily—for however long it takes to achieve the texture you like.

That's it! There are few additions you could do—I like to chop the skin off an onion and peel a carrot then plop the onion and carrot into the bean cooking water to enrich the broth they'll produce as they simmer.

And practice is the only way you'll learn how to get to the right texture of your beans. Beans don't want to be al dente and, unless a recipe calls for it, they don't want to be squishy soft either. I prefer a little tooth, but not so much that I have to chew chew chew. You'll discover what you like, and which beans you like which ways.

Now, onto...

Finding Fun Dried Beans

Most grocery stores over the last few years have begun to offer a great variety of beans for you to choose from. At Clover restaurants we carry Baer's Best Beans, which are beautiful and local.

But if you're like me and you *really* want to commit, let me recommend joining a bean club.

A bean club, you say? Yes, a Bean Club.

In my case, I belong to two quarterly clubs: [The Rancho Gordo Bean Club](#) and the [Vermont Bean Crafters Bean Box](#), so every 3 months a special box arrives on my doorstep with bags of beans, a few special ingredients, and recipes galore. I love it because the clubs intro me to beans I've never heard of before ([Good Mother Stallard?](#) [Eye of the Goat!](#)?) and they tee up easy-to-make meals so I don't have to scramble on the weekends.

Here is my Bean Storage facility, running a bit low as I wait for my next box:



Basically all you need is a colander, a pot, water, and a little time.

More bean emails to come later this month! And thanks to the many of you who have written us with your ideas and encouragement.

