

# *edible* CHICAGO®

The Story of Local Food, Season by Season



LEGUME Legacy

HARD CIDER in  
the WINDY CITY

CHEF Family  
TRADITIONS



# HEIRLOOM BEANS

## The Beauty of the Bean

When I began the research for this edition of *Cooking with the Seasons*, I was astounded at the variety of heirloom beans available. Each bean is so unique and beautiful, I kept thinking of ways to display them in jars or in vases on my dinner table instead of devising recipes in which to cook them. But, I love a pot of slow simmered beans in the fall, garnished with a bit of olive oil or sprinkling of cheese and fresh ground pepper and fresh chopped herbs, so my table centerpiece will have to go, or rather be eaten.

The varieties of dried beans that are available at farmers markets and in local stores have increased in the past few years. Small gourmet stores will offer more variety than your local supermarket. When you buy dried beans from local shops, you can inquire about the age of the beans, but the best way to buy them and insure their freshness, is direct from the grower. The internet is another great source for

ordering dried beans when it is not farmers market season. Store them in an airtight container and use them within two years.

“Beans in the grocery store could be two, five or even ten years old, which means they continue to lose moisture. This makes them shelf stable, but the drier the bean, the longer the cooking time,” according to Tracey Vowell of Three Sisters Garden in Kankakee, Illinois.

**Cooking Beans - to soak or not to soak - that is the question?**

Everybody has an opinion on the best way to cook beans. Contrary to popular belief, soaking the beans does nothing to decrease the flatulence factor. You can, however, gradually increase your intake without worry. The more beans you add to your daily diet, the easier

it will be for your body to adjust to their digestion.

I prefer to soak beans, especially if I have purchased them from the grocery store, as they can be very dry. I think a pre-soaking keeps them from splitting during the quick cook method. If you have purchased beans locally, you can simply cook the beans in a pot of water with seasonings such as onions, carrots, garlic, and fresh herbs. Bring it to a brisk boil. Lower the heat and cook at a bare simmer until tender. The cooking time will not always determine when the beans are done. Simply taste test them to see if they are cooked to your liking.

### Special equipment

I prefer a heavy soup pot such as enamel coated cast iron or a Dutch oven to cook the beans evenly and gently. You may cook the beans on the stovetop or bring them to a boil and then place the pot in a 350° oven and cook 1 to 2 hours until they are tender. The classic bean dish, cassoulet (casserole in France), takes its name from the pot in which it cooks. In Mexico, beans are typically cooked in a clay ceramic pot on the stovetop. Using a pressure or slow cooker is also a good method for cooking beans. Since many slow cookers have different temperature settings, it is best to follow the recommendations on cooking times from your appliance instructions.

Herbs and aromatics such as onions, garlic, rosemary, thyme, parsley or sage are all delicious with any variety of beans. Many chefs will season with salt *midway* through the cooking process to prevent split skins. Reserve tangy or sweet additions such as molasses for baked beans or tomatoes until the beans are fully cooked in order to prevent toughening of the skins. [ec](#)

*Editors' note: heirloom beans can be purchased online at [www.breslinfarms.com](http://www.breslinfarms.com), [ranchogordo.com](http://ranchogordo.com), [seedsavers.org](http://seedsavers.org)*

---

**Dana Benigno**, of [ChicagoCooks.com](http://ChicagoCooks.com) has a wonderful centerpiece of heirloom beans gracing her dinner table, but it is shrinking by the week as she concocts new recipes using her beautiful creation. She is also the Executive Director of the Chicago Green City Market and is a regular contributor to [Edible Chicago](http://Edible Chicago).



## Beans with Rosemary, Sage and Pecorino

*Serves 8*

Leftover beans from this recipe can be pureed and spread on top of toasty crusty bread. Garnish with a drizzle of good olive oil and a few shavings of a sharp hard cheese such as Pecorino. I love to serve a poached egg over mashed beans of any sort from white to pinto to black beans for breakfast. Toss a spoonful of beans from this recipe and add to any salad.

2 cups (beans, choose a variety to try I usually use flageolet or white beans)	fresh sage
water	2 sprigs of rosemary
1 tablespoon kosher salt	olive oil
3 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed	fresh ground pepper

1. Place the beans in a bowl and cover with a generous amount of water. Soak the beans overnight. Drain in the morning.
2. In a large cast iron Dutch oven or heavy enamel pot, add garlic, sage and rosemary and the beans. Add water to cover the beans about 2 to 3 inches over the top. You will need to add water as the beans cook to account for evaporation.
3. Bring the pot to a boil then reduce heat to low and keep the beans at low simmer adding water as necessary. You may cook the beans on stovetop or place in a 350° oven and cook until tender.

**To Serve:** Place a serving of beans on a plate or in a bowl and garnish with grated pecorino, olive oil and salt and fresh ground pepper.

*Editor's note: Cassoulet is a fun weekend project for a group of friends, as it takes time and offers plenty of servings. Go to [www.ediblechicago.com](http://www.ediblechicago.com) for an heirloom bean cassoulet recipe.*

# Heritage Bean Varieties Available Locally

Bean description courtesy of Breslin Farms, Ottawa, Illinois.



## BLACK TURTLE BEANS

This heirloom bean is believed to have originated in southern Mexico and Central America over 7,000 years ago. They have a deep, rich flavor that works superbly in soups, chili, and as refried beans.



## TIGER EYE BEANS

Originally from Chile and Argentina, this bean is a gorgeous orange color with dark-maroon swirling stripes. Similar in taste to a pinto bean, but creamier in texture, the very tender skins almost disappear when cooked, making it a perfect bean for chili or refried beans.



## JACOB'S CATTLE BEANS

Similar to the southwestern Anasazi bean, this is a gem of a bean with an ancient origin. It is kidney shaped with white and red speckles. This full-flavored bean holds its shape after long cooking or baking and possesses a rich aroma.



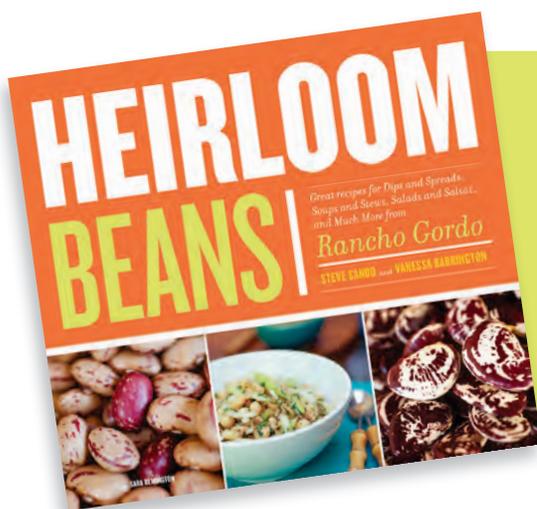
## LIGHT RED KIDNEY BEANS

Exceptional culinary quality, with a silky texture and thin skin. The mild flavor and dry flaky texture is best baked or used in soups.



## CALYPSO BEANS

One of the all-time best beans for baking and using in soups. The Calypso Beans are also known as Orca or Ying Yang for its contrasting black and white colors with a dotted eye. The flavor is mild and the texture is smooth. When cooked, these beans double in size and retain their distinctive coloring. Calypso beans are well loved by bean aficionados for their creamy rich texture and striking color.



Passionate heirloom bean expert Steve Sando offers information on bean varieties, cooking methods and down-to-earth recipes such as soups, dips, stews and more with gorgeous photographs to illustrate.

*Book jacket artwork courtesy of Chronicle Books*