



Bean Box Goods
January 2024

“A party without [beans] is really just a meeting.”

-Julia Childs [edited]

This winter it's been heartening to see a continuous flurry of articles covering the culinary joys, nutritional benefits, and environmental advantages of centering beans in our kitchens' pots and gardens' plots. For a moment there I was wondering if the pop culture moment of embracing beans was going to be one more flash fad, but the interest appears to be keeping up and, if anything, still growing.

America's Test Kitchen just put out a new 400 page cookbook focused on beans and grains in what is a growing canon of bean-centric cook books filling up that section of bookstores.

Julia Childs was credited with saying, “You'll never know everything about anything, especially something you love.” I am faced with that every time we put a new box together, and love that about this work. Fifteen years into this life path I am still constantly learning about new varieties, recipes, and human-plant narratives surrounding pulses and their people. To that end I am also learning regularly learning new details and perspectives about varieties I thought I had already known pretty well. I get more humble and more curious each passing season.

I love how strongly people feel about whether to pre-soak or not, when to salt, and what beans make the best baked beans, the best refritos. How enmeshed with one's identity favas, lentils, peas, chickpeas, or black beans can be. and how I'll never learn all there is to learn about any of these, despite thoroughly enjoying all of them.

This is all to say, I want to emphasize that we are not trying to position ourselves as experts in this space, but more so zealous appreciators of beans excited to share the things we are excited about. You wouldn't be reading this if you weren't already passionate about beans or else intently curious, so we are glad to be in your good company and hope that these short narratives and these beans themselves further catalyze your curiosity and zeal.

I mentioned this last quarter but we have a decent amount of new people here so I wanted to shout out one more time that Serious Eats editor Daniel Gritzer has done a good job of consolidating a lot of apropos questions and taking the time to concisely compile the nuances of soaking (or not), when to salt, cooking stovetop and in the oven. Here's that worthy [primer](#).

They have a number of great deeper dives, including [this one](#) on salting I recommend checking out. For those of your who pre-soak your beans, you can find out how adding 1 tablespoon of salt per quart of soaking water can help the beans expand with less rupturing to their skins due ion exchanges.

If you've found any great such resources (printed or digital) please feel free to share them with me at joe@vermontbeancrafters.com

In this Box

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Organic Jacobs Cattle, Morningstar Farm, VT
Navy Beans, Callan Farms, NY
Organic Adzuki Beans, Ferris Organics, MI
Etna Cranberry Beans, Beatific Vision Farm, VT
Organic Green Lentils, Timeless Foods, MT
Yellow Corn Grits, Marsh Hen Mill, SC

As a reminder, you can view our recommendations for cooking with beans on our website here <https://www.vermontbeancrafters.com/dry-beans>

Jacob's Cattle Beans (*P. Vulgaris*)



Slow Food has a [nice write-up](#) on these beans I encourage folks to check out. The mottled markings on these beans are always such a joyful thing to me. When presenting beans to elementary school classes these are the ones that get kids to stop and 'ooh' over the beans like they're pretty little gems, or maybe exotic bugs. There are many different strains of these beans, the ratio of the red splotches to the white are all over the map and the deepness of the red can be highly variable as well based on how much rain a field gets in a given year and other factors.

These Jacob's Cattle are from Seth and Jeanette Johnson of Morningstar Farm in Glover VT, perhaps the best bean growers in New England! The markings on their beans are distinct from other growers we source from in the Northeast. I have come to think of the nuanced differences in these markings as the fingerprints of each farm and season's vintage. These beans have been traced back at least as far as the 1700's and have very likely been cultivated in the Northeast for much much longer than that. The Abenaki word for beans is "[adebakwal](#)".

These are a great stew bean, and contribute savory flavor and starch to a broth. That said, year-round I enjoy eating these on crusty toast in the morning. I'll reheat a lade-full with their broth in a little six-inch skillet while my bread is toasting, smear some butter or glug some olive oil on the toast while it's still hot and empty the skillet over the toast. I prefer it when that cooking liquid ends up on the toast, creating a range of crusty well-structure toast, and stock-sodden flavor-rich sections, mingling with the melted butter or oil. I top with a dash of apple cider vinegar or a lemon wedge, coarse salt, and [gomasio](#).

Navy Beans (*P. Vulgaris*)



Navy beans aren't commonly grown in the Northeast anymore, but a good amount get grown in the Midwest, primarily for canning. They likely get their current namesake from the fact that they are standard fare in the US Navy, being served in their mess halls since the 1800's. It's no wonder, since they are packed with essential nutrients such as potassium, calcium, iron and folate.

These beans, and beans in general, offer a low-glycemic source of carbohydrates that is particularly well-suited for anyone with diabetes, but useful for anyone who wants a sustained, slow-release form of energy throughout their day. A food is considered low-glycemic if they fall below 55 of the index, which runs up to 100. Navy beans tend to fall in the 30-36 range, well into low-glycemic territory.

There has been research linking navy to improvements in metabolic disorders, lowering cholesterol, decreased risk of cardiovascular disease. There is [further research](#) connecting folate in one's diet with decreased risk for Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia due to this B vitamin's positive impacts on homocysteine in the bloodstream.

Suffice to say there's a lot of health-oriented reasons to eat beans. But let's not forget they're also delicious. They are standard in the Boston version of baked beans, and great in any soup, like this [Pureed White Bean and Winter Squash soup](#) from Martha Rose Shulman. And, lest we forget, navy beans are the go-to bean for [bean pie!](#)

Organic Adzuki Beans (*Vigna angularis*)



Though commonly referred to as adzuki beans these are a member of the *vigna* genus, so more closely related to peas (*vigna* is derived from *vinea*, or vine in latin) which speaks to their tendency, like with other peas, to send out tendrils from their semi-bush habit and explains their pronounced hilum, or 'eye'. These hail from Eastern Asia, and Japan in particular. Red-skinned adzuki are the most common, but there are also white, black, grey and mottled cultivars.

We sourced these adzuki beans from [Ferris Organic Farm](#) in Eaton Rapids MI, a beautiful, diversified family farm that also happen to be the first certified organic bean and grain cleaning facility in the Midwest back in the 1970's.

I've grown adzukis in the past with the explicit intention of making a fully Vermont-grown miso. I made some small batches, but the folks at Rhapsody Natural Foods and [South River Miso](#) do such a good job that I'm sticking with making miso just for fun..

There is a significant amount of content online about how to make your own miso. If you would like to go this route, I recommend ordering some koji from [Rhapsody Natural Foods](#) in Cabot VT. They include miso recipes with every shipment. Just sub in adzuki beans 1:1 for soy beans. Here's an additional [miso how-to video](#).

If you're not up for miso, adzuki are also extremely popular throughout Eastern Asia as a [sweet red bean paste, known as anko](#). Here's an [anko how-to video](#). There is also the Japanese dish Sekihan that combines adzuki beans with mochi rice for a distinct version of the reezy-peezy staple recipe of the Carolinas. Here is a recipe that also includes regional variations on [Sekihan](#).

Etna Cranberry Beans (*P. Vulgaris*)



Cranberry beans are a different name for borlotti beans. Those two are the self-same, but they are distinct from True Red Cranberry beans, which are a fully red, larger, more spherical pole bean. There are a good number of cranberry varieties of this type, including Krimson, Bellagio, and this one, Etna, which is a good choice for the Northeast with its disease resistance and relatively short growing season.

These beans came to us by way of Willie Gibson, who grows them with his family at Beatific Vision Family Farm in Ryegate VT. Willie comes from a dairy farming background and has worked in technical advisory positions in the Vermont agriculture community for years. He cultivated these beans in strip-tillage system. You couldn't meet a nicer person. And there aren't too many made from hardier stock either. I've never not seen Willie barefoot, regardless of the season.

If you are looking for a soft, creamy bean for applications like refried beans or for making a thick-stocked pasta fagioli, these beans are likewise as good as it gets. I'm a big fan of cooking them low and slow while another pot is cooking low and slow with polenta, or grits and then topping the grains with some wilted greens and the beans. Poached eggs are very at home here as well.

In past boxes we included some special hominy grits from Mohawk chef Dave Smoke McClusky of Corn Mafia and provided links to [a succinct disambiguation of polenta grits](#) by his partners at Congaree Milling, as well as some recipes for both [grits](#) and [polenta](#). Try the above with this boxes yellow corn grits from Marsh Hen Mill.

Green Lentils (*Lens Culinaris*)



I always like to talk up Timeless Foods, the source these lentils, and the subject of the very worthwhile read: [Lentil Underground](#). The farmers that are part of Timeless Foods have been redefining the conventional wheat fields of Montana into a more diversified patchwork quilt of legumes, grains, and cover crops.

These lentils are my go-to for dahl which I enjoy with rice and a dollop of full fat yogurt. Here is a great short piece by [Dan of Cooks Illustrated](#) into the why rice and lentils are such a nutritious and delicious pairing. The role of tryptophan and lysine in this were news to me.

Back in March of 2023 the Washington Post did an article titled “Why You Should Eat Lentils Every Day”. It’s behind a pay wall but covers such interesting factoids as the pharaohs of ancient Egypt being buried with lentils, the 13,000 year-long history humans and lentils have together, the high levels of iron, zinc, vitamin B and other precursors to health they’re rich in. It’s worth checking out.

We are gearing up for a cold snap all week here in Vermont so I’m gearing up to make some quick and easy hot meals for dinner, including this version of [Braised Lentils with Red Wine](#) adapted by Nicholas from the Zuni Café cookbook. It’s a simple stew built with lentils atop mirepoix with stock and red wine that can be ready in about a half-hour and sponged up with torn up chunks of a warmed-up baguette.

Yellow Corn Grits (*Zea mays*)



The hominy grits we have included are from Marsh Hen Mill on Edisto Island in SC. I first became aware of them when the owner, Greg Johnsman, presented at the Northern Grain Growers Association annual meeting here in Vermont and did a grits tasting featuring over ten distinct corn varieties as grits. Greg shared that some folks like to use milk in their grits, some cream. He thinks milk is too thin cream too heavy so he uses half and half ☺ I’ve since taken that Goldilocks route when making grits and haven’t regretted it.

Cooking grits is an aromatic meditation. Like beans, they benefit from a long cook on low heat. But unlike beans, they require relatively constant stirring to prevent scalding on the bottom of the pot. Definitely use a thicker bottom pot or seasoned cast iron for the task. Congaree has [a written out recipe and a Youtube video of their recommended cooking method](#).

Here is an [easy grits](#) recipe from Marsh Hen Mill, and here is a [Mac and Cheese alternative](#) version of grits they’ve shared.

You could make a proper meal out of any of your beans, these hominy grits, and some braised greens. The one thing that I always do with my grits that I don’t often see recommended is add a tablespoon of dulce seaweed flakes or sugar kelp to each pot. I really think that marine umami adds a subtle but meaningful layer to the meal.