



Bean Box Goods
April 2024

“Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive.”

-Barry Lopez

It's mid-April, which means the planting window for 2024's bean crop is just about a month away. All of the beans that will be available from this winter through next will be put in the ground in a few weeks. Whatever we hope to have in inventory 8 months out through 20 months from now (basically all of 2025) needs to be provisioned for now. It's pretty intense.

We are hoping for a much better weather year than last year, and are excited for some new seed cleaning equipment that's in the pipeline for us, including one of the first (possibly the first?) optical sorter to land in Vermont. There are a couple at different facilities in Maine and New York, but we are fortunate and grateful to have gotten some grant funding to bring this equipment in-house.

The optical sorter is essentially a computerized machine that uses hundreds of sensors to assess beans as they fall through an air column. Any beans that don't match the preset color specs gets removed by little jets of air. So splits, stones, immature and damaged beans that made it through the prior cleaning steps of the screen cleaner and gravity table (which clean out unwanted material by size and by mass respectively) can be removed much more efficiently and effectively now.

Apologies if that all comes across as a bit wonky, but it's an exciting and big deal for us and our grower

partners. These devices have historically been astronomically expensive and finicky and only in the last few years have the prices started coming down to earth and the technology begun to get somewhat more user friendly.

If you want a sense of what all of this looks like in action, Youtube is full of videos of the components of standard bean cleaning set ups. In order of use, the machines are called: screen cleaner, destoner, gravity table, optical sorter. Some farms, mills, seed cleaners may have some or all, and there are further optional machines like polishers and more depending on the specific crops being cleaned and their specific uses.

Now, back with my culinary hat back on, I want 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

Organic Orca Beans, Morningstar Farm, VT
Organic Black Beans, Schiltz Farms, NY
Organic Garbanzo Beans, Ramona Farms, NM
Black Eyed Peas, Marsh Hen Mill, SC
Yellow Eye Beans, Green Thumb Farm, ME
Organic Buckwheat Groats, Birkett Mills, NY

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

Orca Beans (*P. Vulgaris*)



This is the first time we've been able to offer a VT-grown Orca bean. These beauties have a wide variety of mottling one bean to the next. Seth of Morningstar Farms in Glover, who grew these, reported that he saw a much greater variation in the patterns on these than he sees in Jacobs Cattle and Yellow Eye beans. In different parts of the same field there was noticeable variations ranging from beans nearly 50% covered in speckles looking like a Holstein cow, to others that just had a dark marking near their hilum.

When cooked, the darker pigment in the one part of the seedcoat ends up pigmenting the lighter part so that the result is a mottling of darker and lighter purple markings. Not as dramatic as the dried bean, but still pretty.

I'd recommend preparing these simply. Boiling them with the usual suspects of salt to taste, a glug of good oil or a pat of butter, a few inches of kombu, a pinch of oregano and spoonful of cumin. Let that just cook low and slow and when done use a slotted spoon to take them from the pot to a ready and waiting tostada, arepa, or even crusty slice of toast. Counterbalance the earthy, starchy orbs of Orca with a squeeze of fresh lime, dollop of sour cream, and some sprigs of cilantro or flatleaf parsley.

These simple preparations are so versatile. Most weekends I cook a pot for the week. There's always a quart container of cooked and seasoned beans ready to add substance as a center or side to whatever else we're eating amidst our often too-busy weekdays' meal times.

Black Beans (*P. Vulgaris*)



I think of black beans as the gateway bean. While I almost didn't include them in this first shipment out of a concern for them being considered too 'common', they are a central part of my life, and they are worthy of sharing enthusiastically. There are hundreds of varieties of black beans. Some make richer stocks for cooks, some have better agronomic qualities for farmers. Some are prized for their fabric dyeing traits, creating an indigo-like hue.

The variety included here is a variety called Black Beard which farmer Peter Schiltz in Lawrenceville NY chose to grow due to its reputation as a higher-yielding resistant variety. We like it as it is among the black beans that create rich stocks (known as 'pot liquor') and maintains a satisfying texture somewhere between toothsome and creamy.

I grew up eating black beans on a regular basis. I had a particularly profound moment I still clearly recall when I had a simple bowl of canned black beans with Adobo prepared by my sister's roommate in college. She was from the Dominican Republic and the bowl of beans she made was the first time where I came to understand a bowl of beans as a wholly satisfying main course, versus a filling or a side. This recipe is one of many possible variations on Habichuelas Guisadas, or 'bean stew', a standard and timeless bowl of beans. There are innumerable variations. It is a flexible recipe. Take liberties based on your personal preferences and what's in your pantry. Here's the gist:

Habichuelas Guisadas Recipe – 1 hour, plus soaking

With 1 lb dry black beans this yields 8 large servings.

Ingredients

1 lb dry black beans (2 lbs cooked weight)
1.5 qts water (adding more as needed to cover beans)
1 tablespoon of high heat oil (sunflower, canola, etc)
1 small yellow onion
1 red bell pepper
4 peeled and crushed garlic cloves
1 tomato or else 1 tablespoon tomato paste
1 tablespoon sea salt
1/2 teaspoon Sazon (*a spice blend containing coriander, cumin, annatto, and oregano; Loisa makes an organic blend in NYC and sells it online)
1 teaspoon of Mad River Botanicals oregano

Soak your 1 lb of black beans ahead of time in 1 quart of water in the pot you wish to cook them in. Once fully plumped and sunk to the bottom, you want to put a slightly ajar lid on top and bring them to a simmer for about an hour, making sure they stay under 1/2 inch of water all the while.

For a richer stock, you really want to cook the beans in the water within which they were soaked, and to retain the cooking liquid. You don't have to, but it will not be quite so good and unctuous if you don't.

While your beans are cooking you want to get a simple sofrito going. Fill a pan with your 1 tablespoon of oil and put the pan on medium-low heat.

Dice all of your vegetables and add them to the pan. Stir occasionally to keep them coated in oil and to keep them evenly cooked. Once the vegetables start 'sweating' and onions begin to become translucent add your garlic, tomato paste, and seasoning. Stir in and reduce heat to low. Let those vegetables and seasonings continue to meld on low while your beans finish cooking.

Once your beans are fully softened (you should be able to easily crush a bean with your tongue across the roof of your mouth without feeling any grittiness). Take a potato masher and gently crush the beans to release them from their skins and thicken the stew to a creamy thicker consistency. Stir in your sofrito and reduce the pot to low and let the flavors meld for at least ten minutes. Taste for salt. Serve with cilantro and minced raw onion on top.

This dish is even better reheated the next day. It thickens up further and the flavors develop and meld more.

Organic Garbanzo Beans (*Cicer arietinum*)



There are at least forty species and several wild varieties. Archaeological records date back 10,000 years in the lands currently called Turkey and Syria, and what was formerly Mesopotamia. New England is very unlike these climates, however out West they grow quite well.

We source our organic chickpeas, or 'Kalvash', from Ramona Farms which is owned and managed by the Buttons, an Akimel O'Odham family growing on their ancestral lands in what is now known as Arizona. This crop was originally brought to the area from the Mediterranean by a Spanish Jesuit Missionary in the 1700's and has been grown along other more traditional crops like tepary beans ever since. These are the same chickpeas we use in our falafel at Bean Crafters. There are none better in the States as far as we are concerned.

These of course are fantastic in hummus ("hummus" is the Arabic word for chickpeas, by the way), but there are countless good hummus recipes online. As such, we're going to offer you an equally simple and satisfying recipe from that neck of the woods: chana masala. 'Chana' means chickpeas, and 'masala' refers to the spice blend used to season them in this dish.

One of my closest friends grew up in India and through regular potlucks introduced me to a whole world of flavors and aromas I hadn't known before. Chana masala is about as easy as it gets, and the leftovers are really versatile. I put them in veggie wraps, reheat them with eggs in the morning a la shakshuka, or snack on them as is the next day as a cold bean salad.

Chana Masala – 1 hour, plus soaking time

With 1 lb dry chickpeas this yields 8 one-cup servings.

Ingredients

1 lb chickpeas (2 lbs cooked weight)
1.5 quarts of cooking water
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 yellow onion, diced
1 tomato, diced
1 tablespoon olive oil
½ of one inch of fresh ginger, minced
1 tablespoon of sea salt
2 teaspoons of garam masala
1 green jalapeño or equivalent pepper if you like heat
1 lemon's juice

Rinse and soak your chickpeas. Cover with water and bring to a boil. This is a great dish for trying to add a bit of baking soda to your beans as they cook. After the chickpeas have come to a boil, reduce heat to medium-low and add 1 teaspoon of that alkaline alchemy. Skim off any foam that forms after adding the baking soda. Cover the pot with a lid and get to work on your masala.

Caramelize your diced onion in the 1 T of olive oil. Once caramelized, add your tomato and ginger, then the salt and garam masala. If you want it spicy, mince and add your pepper now. The liquid from the tomato will soak up the spices and the pan's contents will begin to thicken. If you want to, you can cool the contents now and blend it for a smoother sauce.

Check on your chickpeas after about forty-five minutes. We want them to be soft, not chalky at all, but not totally falling apart. If they are ready, ladle a cup of the cooking liquid into the pan that contains your sauce. Stir them together to thin out the sauce and begin adding the chickpeas until you have included all of the chickpeas. Depending on how much water evaporated, or not, you may end up with extra cooking liquid.

Now that the chickpeas are in the pan steeped in that glorious masala sauce, squeeze the juice of one lemon over top of it all and bring the pan back to a simmer for 10 minutes to get it all to meld. Taste it at this point and add more salt and garam masala to taste, a pinch at a time if need be.

If I have a can of full fat coconut milk in the cabinet, I will finish this dish with a heaping tablespoon of the coconut cream congealed at the top of the can. That fatty creaminess really puts an exclamation point on it all. A dollop of whole milk yogurt does too. Serve over rice.

Black Eyed Peas (*P. Vulgaris*)



Most everyone seems to know of Black Eyed Peas, but not too many people up here in the Northeast seem to have had the pleasure of eating them. Or if they have, they don't constitute a regular part of their diet. No one is commercially growing them in the Northeast at present as they are more heat-loving bean being. There aren't too many farm-direct sources we could find, but we were able to track down some B.E.P.s from Marsh Hen Mill, a diversified farm on Edisto Island that specializes in grains and peas.

As you may well know, they make for incredible eating, and are a staple in Southern cuisine, with Hoppin' John being their perhaps most famous application.

Importantly, these are not another common bean (*P. Vulgaris*) with roots in South America. These are *V. unguiculata* and trace their roots to Western Africa. Their presence in southern cuisine is one more complicated legacy from the nefarious transatlantic movement of enslaved humans.

You could choose to hold on to these and make some Hoppin' John for New Years. There are many versions of this recipe, some being as simple as 1 lb bacon + 1 pint peas + 1 pint rice. I'm not authority on southern cooking, but appreciated [the deep dive Serious Eats did on Hoppin' John here](#). And for the visually-inclined, [here is a video how-to](#) recently put out by Georgia Cooking for Soul that gets you there too.

If you wanted a less well-trodden path for your peas, I personally really enjoyed making acarajé, which I came across by way of Sandor Katz's *Art of Fermentation*. It is a fried fritter of sorts that is the foundation of many different meals in parts of Africa and Brazil in particular. I've seen its origins credited to the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. Many preparations and interpretations can be found online. I'd love to hear others' experiences with different acarajé recipes.

Yellow Eye Beans (*P. Vulgaris*)



There are baked beans, and then there are bean-in-hole beans. While there is a lot of contention around what bean varieties make the best baked beans, there seems to be more agreement (though certainly not a consensus) around yellow eye beans being the classic choice for a Maine bean-in-hole supper. If you haven't heard of a bean-in-hole supper, we hope to have a video out later this winter of one. In the mean time [here is some background and recipes from Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association](#).

Previously we have offered a yellow eye bean that had been grown organically by Lovers Brook Farm in Maine. That bean looked to be a Keneary Yellow Eye Bean. This time around we are offering you what *looks to me* to be a Steuben Yellow Eye bean grown organically by Morningstar Farm in Vermont. Seth states he was originally told this line of bean seed he's been growing for years was Keneary though. So whose to say!?

What's in a name anyway? Some folks also end up calling these self-same beauties Dot-Eye Beans, Molasses-Face Beans, and still others Butterscotch Calypso. Whatever the name they all of course share common ancestors. What we refer to as the Keneary strain in particular came from bean breeders up in Nova Scotia making selections from old timey yellow eye beans. They developed the Keneary Yellow Eye bean over time, which boasts a larger eye (the dark coloring around its hilum), and for farmers' sake, a more uniform maturity. That's probably the most important distinction. You in turn could plant these beans and make your own variety in time, selecting from your earliest-maturing plants, variations in color patterns, or a more upright growing habit. Bean breeding need not be spectator sport.

Buckwheat Groats (*Fagopyrum Esculentum*)



We love buckwheat. Buckwheat is the common name of this delicious crop, but it is not related to wheat at all, and contains no gluten. The name is derived from the Dutch word for Beech, since the seeds of buckwheat look a lot like beech nuts. It is actually in the knotweed family (*Fagopyrum esculentum*) and more closely related to rhubarb and sorrel. In other parts of the world it is known as kasha (the Polish word for 'pasta').

As a crop buckwheat is rare as it can break down phosphate in the soil and turn it into a form that is bio-available for other plants, making farms less-dependent on importing rock phosphate as fertilizer. Because of this, its short season (it goes from seed to harvest in just 10-12 weeks), its blossoms serving as a great nectary for pollinators, and its fast-growing habit helping it to outcompete weed competition, it is a popular cover crop interspersed into bean and grain crop rotations, as well as on vegetable farms.

Just 100 grams of buckwheat contains more than 20% of the recommended daily value of protein, fiber, and four different B vitamins. It is exceptionally high (more than 65% DV) niacin, magnesium, and a variety of other key vitamins and minerals. It's a nutrition powerhouse.

Culinarily, buckwheat offers a nut-free nutty flavor. We put them in our black bean burgers, but also toast them and add them to salads for staff lunch. One of my favorite applications is making them similar to wheat bulgur to prepare a [tabouleh](#)

Just north of us in Maine and Nova Scotia there is an Acadian culinary tradition of making a thick crepe-like dish called [ploys](#) out of buckwheat flour, often eaten with baked beans, that is very much worth trying.

Here is a list of [other buckwheat recipes](#) to get your creative juices flowing.