

Beans, Beans, the musical fruit??

Hearty soups, stews baked beans and chili are the comfort food of winter in the Willamette Valley. Soups and stews keep the belly full and bodies full of energy. Beans and legumes are often a basic ingredient for these flavorsome bowls of goodness. Whether you open a can or jar from the shelf or cook up a bag of dried beans at home, beans are full of fiber, protein, vitamins, calcium, Iron and other minerals. Research continues to show beans effective in lowering blood pressure and cholesterol, improving blood glucose levels and potential for preventing colon cancer. And did I say they are cheap? A can of pinto beans costs about 19 cents per ½ cup serving and 7 cents per ½ cup serving of cooked, dried beans.

Thousands of varieties grow through the world, i All dried beans require rehydration followed by a long cooking time (1 ½ to 2 hours). Legumes, like peas, black-eyed peas, lentils, split peas do not require soaking and have a short cooking time of around 30 minutes. .

Beans and legumes are packed with nutrition but many people avoid beans and legumes and other gas producing foods because of gas, bloating and flatulence. Solutions to this problem have been shared by cooks and scattered through the internet, blogs and cookbooks. Contradictions? Plenty.

The problem with beans is that humans lack an enzyme in our stomach to digest a class of sugars and process some of the soluble fibers beans have in abundance. Therefore, most of its digestion is done by fermentation in the upper and lower intestines. This process releases gas or flatulence while digestion is occurring. If your digestive system is used to it and it has the right stomach bacteria, then flatulence may be less of a problem.

But are there effective ways to lessen the effect of these sugars and soluble fibers before this process starts? Yes North Dakota State University published a “All About Beans, Nutrition, Health Benefits, Preparation and Use in Menus (reviewed February 2019. I have included some extracts but the full PDF is available online by searching for that article by name as well. Lots of good information.

Try these tips to reduce the occurrence of intestinal gas when eating beans:

- Increase beans in your diet slowly. For example, you may start by eating 2 to 4 tablespoons of beans per day, and gradually increase each day.***
- Drink more water each day as you eat more beans (or other fiber-containing foods).***
- Use the hot soak method when preparing dry beans. The longer beans soak, the more you will reduce the amounts of the gas-producing compounds.***
- Change the water several times when soaking dry beans, and discard this water when soaking is completed. Many of the gas-causing carbohydrates are released into this soaking water.***
- Rinse canned beans without sauce (such as kidney, navy, Great Northern) before eating or using in recipes.***
- Consider using a gas-reducing enzyme tablet. These tablets are available over the counter in many pharmacies.***

•Market Fresh Ideas October 26, 2019