

Legumes: Budget Friendly Nutrition Powerhouses

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Are you cooking more at home these days? Are you looking for ways to provide healthy family meals while staying within a tight budget?

Legumes — a class of vegetables that includes beans, peas and lentils — are among the most versatile and nutritious foods available. Yet legumes are among the least expensive foods to include in your family's meals.



Legumes are nutrition powerhouses and are unique because, nutritionally, they belong to both the protein and vegetable food groups. They have no cholesterol, are high in fiber, and are naturally low in fat. They are also good sources of folate, potassium, iron, and magnesium.

When included in your diet, legumes can help reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers. They are a good choice for people who must control blood sugar, and a good option for a meatless meal.

Legumes are so versatile. They are inexpensive and available dry, canned, or frozen. One half cup of cooked beans or peas equals 2 ounces of protein or a serving of vegetables and provides 10 grams of dietary fiber.

Though dry beans don't require soaking, doing so reduces cooking time and helps dissolve gas-producing oligosaccharides. For soaking, use 10 cups of water per pound. Beans double or triple in size, so use a large pot. Bring water to a boil and simmer beans 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from heat, cover, and let stand 1 to 4 hours. Drain, add fresh water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer gently until beans are tender but firm. Most beans will cook in 45 minutes to 2 hours.

Lentils and split peas do not require soaking. Sort and remove debris, rinse, and boil lentils 15 to 20 minutes, split peas 30 minutes. Do not add salt during cooking.

While you can add herbs and spices at any time during cooking, wait to add salt until beans are tender as it tends to toughen them. Acidic foods (lemon juice, vinegar, tomatoes, wine, etc.) should be added after beans are cooked because they can prevent beans from becoming tender.

For more detailed information about cooking dry beans, an informational fact sheet can be found at: <https://food.unl.edu/documents/cooking-dry-beans.pdf>. In addition, if you have an Electric Pressure Cooker, you can go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4F1Vpb5mmU> and learn how to save time by using it to easily prepare dry beans.

For added convenience, you can cook dried beans and peas, divide into small quantities, and freeze. To reduce sodium in canned beans, drain and rinse them. This will remove about 40 percent of the sodium.

There are many ways to add legumes to your diet.

- At the salad bar, add garbanzo and kidney beans;
- Add lentils to spaghetti sauce;
- Include beans and lentils when making soup, stew, or a casserole.
- Enjoy hummus as a snack with vegetable dippers and whole-grain pita bread or crackers, and spread on a sandwich or wrap.
- Prepare legumes as a side dish, and explore how other cultures feature beans by trying an ethnic recipe.
- Edamame (green soybeans) are great as a snack, also add them to salads, casseroles, and rice dishes.

So why not take advantage of the great nutrition and low price of legumes. Plan on including some in your family meals this week!

Find more information about these topics and others, by contacting the Wildcat Extension District offices at: Crawford County, 620-724-8233; Labette County, 620-784-5337; Montgomery County, 620-331-2690; Wilson County, 620-378-2167; Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930. Wildcat District Extension is on the Web at <http://www.wildcatdistrict.ksu.edu>. Or, like our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district.

For more information, please contact Barbara Ames, Family and Consumers Sciences Agent, bames@ksu.edu, (620)331-2690.

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