



This is a great summer party or winter comfort side dish. The hands-on time is minimal, and the pay off is hearty, creamy, tangy. Yes, beans are creamy! See the notes for ideas to customize to your tastes.

Matt's Baked Beans

I call these Matt's Baked Beans because my son, Matthew, needs a carb element in his meal, and this side dish is one of his favorites. For the best taste, the ingredients need to simmer for two hours. It's not a "quick" recipe, but all you have to do is prep (15-20 minutes), and then simmer and stir occasionally. A great feature is that you can make this dish a day or two ahead of time, refrigerate, and simply reheat. Serves 4.

Ingredients

4 slices of thick-cut bacon - diced small

1/2 onion, diced small

1/2 green bell pepper (or red or yellow), diced small

2 big cloves of garlic, minced

1 inch of fresh ginger, peeled and minced

1/2 teaspoon dry mustard

1/2 teaspoon ground cumin

1 can (15 oz) kidney beans, undrained

1 can (15 oz) pinto beans, undrained

1 hot pepper, whole (jalapeno, serrano, or habanero)

1/2 cup of your favorite BBQ sauce

A sprinkle of apple cider vinegar (1/2 teaspoon)

4 Tablespoons molasses

1/4 cup brown sugar

1/2 bottle of beer (optional) or 3/4 cup chicken stock

Salt & Pepper to taste

First, find a pot that allows this to be a one-pot dish. I use a 3-quart Viking pot that has tall sides.

Put the bacon into the pot (no oil needed) and cook over medium-low heat for about 6 minutes so that the fat starts to render and the bacon begins to cook, but don't let it get crispy. Go for edible chewy.

Leave the bacon and fat in the pot. Add the diced onions, bell pepper, garlic and ginger. Cut a slit into the side of the hot pepper, and throw it into the veg mixture, whole. It will impart flavor but not much heat. Cook the veg for 4-5 minutes until the onions and bell peppers are softened (but NOT mushy). They should still have a little bite. Stir occasionally.

Then, add the dry mustard, and stir for a minute so that the mustard is incorporated and begins to thicken the mixture.

Next, add the cumin, the splash of vinegar, the beans (undrained), the brown sugar, BBQ sauce, beer (if using, or chicken stock) and molasses. Stir - then bring it to a high simmer and then reduce the heat so that you have a gentle simmer.

Let this mixture simmer gently for 2 hours. Or - let it simmer for 1 and 1/2 hours, and then simmer it for another 30 minutes just before you eat. Stir occasionally.

The mixture will reduce while it simmers. That's good. It's concentrating the flavors. If you worry that you're losing too much liquid, add water or chicken stock in small amounts, but you really should be okay as long as you simmer the mixture gently.

Salt and pepper to taste at the end. Serve piping hot.

Notes: There are several options with this recipe: the hot pepper (or no hot pepper); the beer (or no beer); the BBQ sauce (I prefer tangy over sweet); and the choice of beans. Use any beans you like, in any combination. Just remember to include them **UNDRAINED**. You can easily substitute black beans or garbanzo beans for the kidney or pinto beans. You can use all pinto beans. Whatever you like! If you double the recipe, try pinto, kidney AND black beans. I've done that before, and it's delicious. I also enjoy a big pinch of sea salt on top, right before eating. Make it your own! Enjoy!

P.S.: Whoever gets to eat the hot pepper that has simmered away throughout the cooking process is the luckiest diner at the table. That pepper is delicious.

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