



I grew up in Indiana and saw lots of ham & beans at restaurants, pitch in dinners, etc. It was too white and soupy for me. Sorry, Indiana. My version is more like a stew of ham and beans, along with bacon and broccoli. Familiar flavors with a different texture than the traditional midwestern dish. Use the vegetables that you like. Kale or green beans would be a fine addition. Be sure to read the notes. Go easy on the salt.

Fridge Dive #1: Ham & Beans of sorts

Usually, I write menus and load up on food (with Joe's help) on Saturdays and Tuesdays, but sometimes life gets in the way, and we have to "make do" with whatever is on hand. Those nights I call a Fridge Dive. I look through the fridge and pantry and see what we have, and try my best to make it work. This is one of those recipes. My version of ham and beans is more like a stew than a soup, but you can make it either way, with more or less chicken stock. Use whatever vegetables are available, keeping in mind that celery, carrots and onions are the base. It's a recipe that comes together quickly, so if you have everything prepped, dinner is ready in less than an hour from start to finish. Serves 3 easily.

Ingredients

- 3 slices thick-cut bacon, chopped into big pieces
- 2 ham steaks, chopped into bite-size pieces
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 cup of broccoli florets, cut small
- 1 sprig of rosemary, picked and minced
- 1 box (quart) of low sodium chicken stock
- 3 cans of white beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 cup of panko bread crumbs
- 3 Tablespoons butter
- ¼ cup parsley, chopped

Kosher salt (a pinch or two)

When preparing the celery, carrots and onion, dice each to approximately the same size. Have your ingredients ready to go, as this meal comes together quickly.

In a soup pot, cook the bacon pieces over medium heat, allowing the fat to render. Remove the bacon when it is cooked (edible chewy, not yet crispy). You'll return it to the pot in a few minutes.

Add the celery, carrots and onion to the pot (in the bacon fat) along with a pinch of salt. Cook for 3 minutes over medium high heat. Add the broccoli, ham and rosemary, and cook for another 2 minutes, stirring frequently. If your pot is too dry, add a splash of canola oil. Next, pour the cleaned beans into the pot, along with the bacon, and stir everything together.

Add the chicken stock – just enough to cover all ingredients. This should be a little less than a quart. You can use the whole quart if you wish. If you do, your meal will be more like a soup. Let bubble on medium heat until heated through.

In the meantime, make your topping! Melt the butter in a medium size skillet, add the panko, and stir until golden and crispy. Remove from the heat, and stir in the parsley.

Serve in a bowl, and top with the panko mixture. The crunchy topping is important to the texture of the meal and holds up well while you are eating.

Notes: I purposely added only a pinch of salt to this recipe, because the bacon and ham provide ample salt to the meal. Pancetta is a perfect substitute for the bacon. Some torn kale would be delicious in here. I didn't have any in the fridge; otherwise, I would have used it. Add kale (or chard or spinach leaves) toward the end of the cooking time so that it retains its color and texture. And, as always, a little hot sauce on top always helps.

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