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Shopping for Health: Beans, Peas, and Lentils[1]

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What's the Big Deal about Beans?

Beans, one of the most wholesome foods in nature, provide a wide range of health benefits—they come packed with protein, fiber, potassium, and vitamins.(1) Naturally low in fat, they contain no cholesterol and are very low in saturated fat. Beans rich in color are also high in antioxidants.

Shopping for Beans

Beans, peas, and lentils are also called *legumes* or *pulses*. A wide variety of pulses is found all over the world, each with a unique color, shape, and flavor. Some commonly consumed beans, peas, and lentils are featured throughout this publication.

Beans, peas, and lentils may be available fresh, frozen, or, more commonly, **dried** or **canned**.



Figure 1. Black turtle.
Credit: Sarah Gilbert, used here under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.



Figure 2. Cannellini.
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Figure 3. Red kidney.
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Figure 4. Brown lentils.
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Figure 5. Pinto.
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Figure 6. Chickpeas.
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Dried Beans

When shopping for dried beans, you should look for beans that are bright in color and uniform in size. Do not purchase packages with cracked or broken beans, as they might have been damaged by insects.

Canned Varieties

Various types of beans come in a canned form, including red kidney beans, white kidney beans, pinto beans, black beans, and garbanzo beans/chickpeas. When choosing canned beans, those labeled "low sodium" or "no added salt" are the healthiest choices. For more information on reduced-sodium foods, see Shopping for Health: Sodium (EDIS #FSHN10-06)

Beans and Nutrition

When deciding what type of beans to buy, consider nutritional content. Most beans have similar base nutritional values, high in protein and fiber. Table 1 lists some common beans and their protein, fiber, and calorie contents.[2]

Meals with Beans

Beans can be used in a variety of ways, from salad toppings to main course dishes. Table 2 lists some good ways to incorporate canned beans into different dishes.

Beans can also be incorporated into desserts, snacks, and convenience foods. For example, canned kidney beans can be mashed and added to canned pasta and tomato sauce or even used to extend ground beef in burgers and meatloaf. "Low sodium" or "no added salt" canned beans work very well in cake and cookie recipes. See what follows for some great recipes!

Black-Bean Brownies

1 box brownie mix (plus additional required ingredients listed on the box)

1 can (15 ounce) black beans, no salt added, drained and rinsed

Mash black beans with a fork until very smooth. Prepare brownie mix, following directions on the box, and stir in mashed beans as the last ingredient. Bake brownies according to box instructions. Enjoy!

Birthday Cupcakes

1 box vanilla cake mix (plus additional required ingredients listed on box)

1 (15 ounce) can cannellini beans, no salt added

Mash beans in a separate bowl with a fork until smooth. Prepare cake mix, following directions on the box, adding beans with other required ingredients. Mix well. Bake according to directions. Frost with choice of frosting.

Creamy Black-Bean Dip

1 container (16 ounce) fat-free cream cheese

1 can (15 ounce) reduced-sodium black beans, drained and rinsed

3 Tbsp fresh cilantro

2 Tbsp chopped tomato (optional)

¾ cup cheddar cheese, shredded

Salt and pepper to taste

Mash half the can of beans with a fork. Mix mashed beans with the cream cheese and cilantro until smooth. Gently stir in the rest of the beans. Before serving, sprinkle cheese and chopped tomato on top. Serve with tortilla chips or crackers.

Learn More

The UF/IFAS Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent at your local UF/IFAS Extension office may have more information. In Florida, visit our local Extension office directory to find your local UF/IFAS Extension office.

More bean recipes can be found at:

- U.S. Dry Bean Council
- Pulse Recipes | Pulse Pledge

Reliable nutrition information may be found at the following sites:

- UF/IFAS Extension Solutions
- Nutrition.gov

End Notes

(1) US Department of Agriculture. Beans and peas are unique foods. 12 Dec 2022. https://realfood.gov/

(2) US Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, FoodData Central. Version Current: 2019. https://fdc.nal.usda.gov

Protein and fiber contents of beans with average calorie counts per serving.

Beans (½ cup serving)	Calories	Protein (g)	Fiber (g)
Red Kidney	110	7	6
Pinto	120	8	7
Black (Turtle)	120	7	5
Chickpeas	140	7	6
Split Peas	114	8	8
Lentils	110	9	8

Adding beans to your meals.

Bean Type	Use
Navy	Soups, stews, baked beans, purées
Kidney	Chili, three-bean salads
Pinto	Refried, stews, dips, Tex-Mex dishes
Great Northern	Soups, stews
Garbanzo	Salads, hummus
Lentils	Soups, stews

[1] This document is FSHN11-05 (the Spanish language version of this publication is FSHN11-5S: De compras para la salud: Frijoles, guisantes y lentejas), one of a series of the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date June 2011. Revised May 2016, August 2019, and January 2023. Visit the Ask IFAS website at https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/ for the currently supported version of this publication.

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