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ALL ABOUT HEIRLOOM BEANS



Unlike commercial beans bred for high yields and uniformity, heirloom bean varieties are cherished for their rich flavors, vibrant colors, and deep cultural roots that are often passed down for generations within families or communities. Each type has a story, reflecting the culinary traditions and agricultural heritage of specific regions around the world.

Historically, beans have been a staple in human diets for thousands of years. Archaeological evidence shows that beans were cultivated in the Americas as early as 7,000 years ago, particularly in Mesoamerica and the Andes. Many heirloom varieties today descend from these ancient lineages, preserved by indigenous communities and small-scale farmers who selected for flavor, nutrition, and climate resilience rather than mass production traits. These beans became deeply embedded in local foodways, adapted to diverse microclimates and soil conditions.

Heirloom beans are typically grown using traditional, sustainable methods that emphasize biodiversity and seed preservation. As open-pollinated plants, they allow farmers to save seeds each season, maintaining regional traits and genetic diversity. Grown as bush or pole types depending on the variety, they require little more than sun, water, and support, and often thrive in organic or regenerative systems.

Production remains small-scale and hands-on, with harvesting, drying, and shelling often done manually to protect quality and seed viability. After drying, beans are stored in breathable containers and sold through farmers markets, specialty retailers, or seed-saving networks, rather than mass-market channels.

Beyond their nutritional value, heirloom beans are prized by chefs for their complex textures and ability to elevate simple dishes. In an age of agricultural uniformity, they represent a flavorful act of preservation and a connection to the past, reminding us that diversity on the plate begins with diversity in the field.

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HEALTHY INGREDIENT CONTRIBUTION



Heirloom beans such as cranberry, Jacob's Cattle, Anasazi, Scarlet Runner, and Yellow Eye are nutrient-dense legumes that provide a powerhouse of fiber, protein, vitamins, and minerals. Their nutritional profile supports heart health, blood sugar regulation, digestive wellness, and sustainable energy. Although nutritional values may vary slightly by variety, the general nutritional profile of 1 cup (approx. 170g) of cooked heirloom beans is comprised of:

- **Calories:** 240
 - Calories provide energy and fuel for every bodily function from thinking to physical activity
- **Protein:** 15g (30% DV)
 - Protein builds and repairs tissues, including muscle, skin, and organs as well as being important for enzyme and hormone production
- **Dietary Fiber:** 15g (34% DV)
 - Dietary fiber supports digestion by promoting healthy bowel movements and helps reduce cholesterol, controls blood sugar, and supports long-term heart and gut health
- **Total Fat:** 1g (2% DV)
 - Fat provides energy, helps absorb fat-soluble vitamins, protects organs, and is essential for brain function and hormone production
- **Carbohydrates:** 40g (85% DV)
 - Carbohydrates are a primary source of energy for the brain and muscles, and are digested slowly which helps with energy stability and blood sugar control
- **Iron:** 4.5mg (25% DV)
 - Iron is essential for making hemoglobin (transports oxygen in the blood), helps prevent fatigue, and supports immune function
- **Magnesium:** 85mg (20% DV)
 - Magnesium is involved in over 300 biochemical reactions including muscle/nerve function, blood sugar control, and blood pressure regulation
- **Potassium:** 700mg (14% DV)
 - Potassium helps regulate fluid balance, muscle contractions, and nerve signals
- **Folate (Vitamin B9):** 300mcg (75% DV)
 - Folate is crucial for DNA synthesis and cell division, both of which are very important during pregnancy
- **Zinc:** 2.2mg (20% DV)
 - Zinc supports immune function, wound healing, DNA synthesis, cell growth, helps fight infection, and supports healthy skin and vision
- **Calcium:** 60mg (5% DV)
 - Calcium is vital for building and maintaining strong bones/teeth and helps support muscle function, nerve signaling, and heart rhythm

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TYPES AND VARIETIES

Heirloom beans offer distinct taste and texture, reflect regional food traditions, and support genetic diversity and resilient farming systems, making them a flavorful, culturally rich, and sustainable choice. Listed below are some of the most popular and unique heirloom bean varieties:



- **Cranberry Beans (Borlotti)**
 - Appearance: Creamy beige with maroon speckles
 - Flavor: Mild, nutty, slightly sweet
 - Origin: Popular in Italy and Latin America
- **Anasazi Beans**
 - Appearance: Red and white spotted beans
 - Flavor: Sweet, mild, meaty texture
 - Origin: Named after Ancestral Puebloans of the S.W. U.S.
- **Jacob's Cattle Beans**
 - Appearance: Red with white spotting
 - Flavor: Rich, earthy, robust
 - Origin: Early settlers in the Northeastern U.S.
- **Scarlet Runner Beans**
 - Appearance: Large, black-purple with pink streaking
 - Flavor: Nutty, meaty, dense bite
 - Origin: Native to Central America
- **Yellow Eye Beans**
 - Appearance: Creamy white with a mustard-colored "eye"
 - Flavor: Mild, buttery
 - Origin: Deep roots in New England
- **Tiger's Eye Beans**
 - Appearance: Golden yellow with swirls of reddish-brown
 - Flavor: Creamy texture, hint of sweetness
 - Origin: Popular in Chilean cuisine
- **Good Mother Stallard Beans**
 - Appearance: Deep burgundy with specks of white
 - Flavor: Full-bodied, earthy
 - Origin: Named after a Southern U.S. seed keeper
- **Black Turtle Beans**
 - Appearance: Small, shiny, and black
 - Flavor: Dense, meaty, sweet finish
 - Origin: Staple in Caribbean and Latin cuisines
- **King of the Early Beans**
 - Appearance: Plump, red-speckled
 - Flavor: Smooth, rich
 - Origin: New England
- **Rattlesnake Beans**
 - Appearance: Green/purple (fresh) or tan/brown (dried)
 - Flavor: Sweet, tender
 - Origin: Grown traditionally in the American South

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SELECTING AND STORING

Selecting Heirloom Beans:

- **Look for Vibrant Color and Uniform Shape**
 - Heirloom beans should have rich hues and distinctive markings. Faded or cracked beans may be older and slower to cook.
- **Feel the Beans**
 - Beans should be hard and dense to the touch. If they crumble or feel chalky, they've aged out of their prime.
- **Buy from Trusted Sources**
 - Look for growers or retailers who specialize in heirloom or organic varieties as freshness and traceability make all the difference.
- **Check the Harvest Date**
 - Ideally, you want beans harvested within the past 12–18 months for best flavor and cookability.



Storing Heirloom Beans:

- **Keep Beans in a Cool, Dry Place**
 - Store your beans in a pantry away from sunlight and moisture.
- **Use Airtight Containers**
 - Store beans in glass jars, tins, or BPA-free containers to protect against humidity and pests.
- **Label with Variety and Purchase Date**
 - Proper labeling helps track freshness especially if you're building a collection of bean varieties.
- **Prime Flavor and Texture**
 - Beans will have the best flavor and texture if consumed within 1-2 years from harvest but are safe to eat for much longer.
- **Freeze for Long-Term Storage**
 - To preserve freshness and prevent pantry pests, you can freeze dry beans in airtight containers for up to 3 years.

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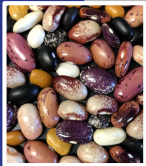
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CULINARY USES

Heirloom beans are so much more than a humble pantry staple, they're culinary rock stars that bring bold flavor, creamy texture, and deep heritage to every dish. Their diversity makes them perfect for both rustic comfort food and elegant, chef-driven creations.



- **Soups & Stews:** Heirloom beans hold their shape beautifully and soak up surrounding flavors making them natural stars in broth, hearty dishes.
- **Salads:** Adding a creamy texture and a protein punch to cold dishes, heirloom beans and their brilliant colors can make any salad pop.
- **Baked Beans & Casseroles:** Heirloom beans like Yellow Eye and King of the Early are ideal for slow baking offering rich, buttery flavors that intensify over time.
- **Purees, Dips, & Spreads:** Blended heirloom beans make flavorful dips and spreads that will give hummus and pate a run for their money.
- **Italian & Mediterranean Dishes:** Varieties like Borlotti and Royal Corona bring rustic elegance to pastas, minestrone, and braised dishes.
- **Global Comfort Food:** Try your hand in using heirloom beans in traditional dishes from around the world like Rajma from India, Feijoada from Brazil, Akara from Africa, and Ful Medames from the Middle East.
- **Grilled & Roasted:** Some large heirloom beans like Royal Corona or Scarlet Runner can be grilled or pan-roasted after boiling for a toothsome, smoky flavor.
- **Desserts & Baking:** The creamy texture of cooked heirloom beans can add richness to brownies, cookies, cakes, and fillings without overpowering sweetness.

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INTERESTING FACTS



- Varieties like Anasazi beans date back over 1,500 years, with seeds found in clay pots in ancient cliff dwelling.
- In ancient Mesoamerican cultures, beans were used alongside cacao as a form of trade and barter.
- In some cultures, vibrantly colored heirloom beans were strung as beads for necklaces, charms, and even rosaries.
- The idea of a magical bean, as in Jack and the Beanstalk, is said to have stemmed from early civilizations discovering how one tiny seed could grow into a towering, food-producing vine.
- Each heirloom bean is like a living artifact carrying a unique genetic code that has been fine-tuned by nature and generations of growers.
- Heirloom beans are one of the most sustainable sources of protein on the planet.
- NASA has researched beans as space food because they're light, nutrient-dense, and produce their own nitrogen making them ideal for growing on Mars or the moon.
- Some farmers swear by the old folklore that beans "know" when it's going to rain saying they swell slightly just before a storm.
- Just like wine or cheese, heirloom beans have terroir, a distinct flavor influenced by soil, climate, and cultivation style, making them perfect to pair with wines, broths, and olive oils.

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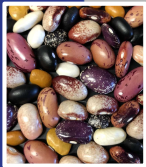
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RECIPE

Tiger's Eye Bean Stew
Yield: 4 Servings

Ingredients:

- 2 Tbsp Olive Oil
 - 1 Small Yellow Onion, Diced
 - 1 Carrot, Peeled & Diced
 - 2 Cloves Garlic, Minced
 - 1 Tsp Smoked Paprika
 - ½ Tsp Ground Cumin
 - ½ Tsp, Dried Thyme
 - 2 Tbsp Tomato Paste
 - 1 ½ Cups Vegetable Stock
 - 1 Cup Tomatoes, Chopped
 - 2 Cups Tiger's Eye Beans, Cooked
 - 3 Cups Kale, Chopped
 - Salt & Black Pepper, To Taste
- Optional Finish: Splash of Sherry Vinegar
Optional Garnishes: Chopped Parsley



Directions:

1. In a large pot, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add onion and carrot; cook for 5-4 minutes until soft. Stir in garlic, smoked paprika, cumin, and thyme. Cook for 1 minute more until fragrant.
2. Add tomato paste and stir well to coat the vegetables. Pour in stock, add the chopped tomatoes, and bring to a simmer.
3. Stir in cooked Tiger's Eye beans. Simmer for 10-15 minutes, allowing flavors to meld and stew to thicken.
4. Stir in chopped kale and cook until wilted, about 8 minutes.
5. Taste and adjust seasoning. Add a splash of sherry vinegar for brightness if desired.
6. Serve hot, with crusty bread or spooned over polenta or rice. Garnish with chopped parsley if desired.
7. **Chef's Tips:**
 1. The stew is excellent with a poached egg or crumbled feta served on top.
 2. Try it with chorizo or smoked tofu for added protein and depth.
 3. Flavors deepen beautifully the next day so try making it the day before and store in the refrigerator overnight.

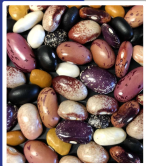
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QUIZ



After you read through this month's Ingredient of the Month, take this quiz to test your knowledge. In order to earn continuing education hours (CEHs) from the American Culinary Federation (ACF), the test must be completed through the ACF's Online Learning Center. Seventy-five percent accuracy is required to earn one hour of continuing education credits toward professional certification.

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QUIZ

Question #1



Archaeological evidence suggests beans were cultivated in the Americas as early as:


- A. 1,000 years ago
- B. 3,500 years ago
- C. 5,000 years ago
- D. 7,000 years ago

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QUIZ

Question #2



What percentage of the daily value (DV) for dietary fiber is provided by one cup of heirloom beans?


- A. 34%
- B. 44%
- C. 54%
- D. 64%

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QUIZ

Question #3



Which vitamin/mineral combination in heirloom beans supports immune function and skin health?


- A. Zinc and Iron
- B. Zinc and Magnesium
- C. Zinc and Folate
- D. Zinc and Vitamin B12

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QUIZ

Question #4



Which heirloom bean has a rich, earthy flavor and a red-and-white spotted appearance, originating from the Northeastern U.S.?


- A. Yellow Eye
- B. Rattlesnake
- C. Jacob's Cattle
- D. Good Mother Stallard

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QUIZ

Question #5



Rattlesnake beans are traditionally grown in the American South. What is unique about their appearance when fresh?


- A. Tan pods with brown streaks
- B. Pale with green eyes
- C. Green pods with purple streaks
- D. Red pods with black tips

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QUIZ

Question #6



Heirloom beans are considered ideal for cooking when they are soft and chalky, as this indicates peak freshness.


- A. True
- B. False

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QUIZ

Question #7



Which heirloom bean varieties are highlighted as ideal for baked beans and casseroles?


- A. Borlotti and Royal Corona
- B. Pinto and Black Turtle
- C. Scarlet Runner and Ful Medames
- D. Yellow Eye and King of the Early

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QUIZ

Question #8



What is a unique way to prepare large heirloom beans like Royal Corona or Scarlet Runner?


- A. Freeze them and eat them raw
- B. Deep-fry them in batter
- C. Grill or pan-roast them
- D. Use them as stuffing for pastries

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QUIZ

Question #9



Each heirloom bean contains a unique genetic code shaped by nature and growers over generations.


- A. True
- B. False

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QUIZ

Question #10




Why is a splash of sherry vinegar added at the end of preparing the Tiger's Eye Bean Stew?

- A. To thicken the stew
- B. To balance flavors
- C. To add color
- D. To preserve the stew

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JOIN US NEXT MONTH!



Stay tuned for the next ACF Ingredient of the Month! Be sure to visit the Online Learning Center (OLC) to download a copy of each month's ingredient presentation. Don't forget to take the official IOTM quiz through the OLC to earn one hour of continuing education credits toward professional certification.

For more information:

- www.acfchefs.org
- www.acfchefs.org/olc
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