

Healthy Eating

Dry Beans: A Healthy Tradition

By Kari Bachman

Generations of Hispanic women have made dry beans the foundation of their families' diets, each day putting a pot on the stove to simmer for several hours. Hispanics still consume more legumes than most other residents of this country.

Beans fill the stomach without emptying the wallet, thanks in part to their high fiber content. But beans are more than just an inexpensive food: they also provide key nutrients, including folate, iron, and protein. They have been linked to the prevention of heart problems and several types of cancer.

Native Americans cultivated *tepany* beans in our region, a variety that's well adapted to dry, hot conditions. Some Hispanics living at higher elevations still grow their own *bolita* beans. While these heirloom varieties are worth seeking out, the *pinto* has supplanted them in most parts of the southwest today. Tourists associate black beans with southwestern cuisine, but they are most commonly consumed in the Caribbean and Central America.

One favorite dish in this region is refried beans, which are often rolled up in a tortilla or served alongside enchiladas. Traditionally this dish is prepared with a considerable amount of lard or solid vegetable shortening, which we now know isn't very healthy.

But instead of eliminating refried beans, try a healthier version. Heat a heavy frying pan with a small amount of liquid vegetable oil, such as canola. Add cooked beans, either homemade or from a can, with a little cooking liquid or water. Turn the heat up to high to give the beans their traditional refried taste. Mash and stir them constantly, adding more liquid from time to time until it reaches desired consistency.

Also, for a change of pace, try a more exotic cold bean salad, adding parsley and lemon juice to give it a Mediterranean flavor. Your family will appreciate your originality, and you'll feel satisfied for having provided one of the most nutritious foods on earth.

Kari Bachman is a nutrition program coordinator with New Mexico State University's Cooperative Extension Service. She can be reached at (505) 646-2009, or by e-mail at kbachman@nmsu.edu.