

BLACK BEAN SOUP from COOK'S ILLUSTRATED Winter 2010

1 pound dried black beans.....Modified version: Libby Geyer
4-8 ounces ham steak or ham hock 1 (29 oz.) or 2 (15 oz.) can black beans,
2 bay leaves Eliminate bean soaking process and add beans
5 cups water to soup when adding chicken broth. Cook ham in
1/8 teaspoon baking soda oven until 170 °F, or falls off bone. Dice or shred.
1 teaspoon table salt Add to soup after soup is thickened. Simmer.

For the beans:

Place beans, ham, steak, bay leaves, water and baking soda in a large saucepan with a tight lid. Bring to boil over medium-high heat; using a large spoon, skim foam as it rises to surface. Stir in salt, reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer briskly until beans are tender, 1 ¼ to 1 ½ hours (if needed add 1 cup water and continue to simmer until beans are tender); do not drain beans. Discard bay leaves. Remove ham steak/hock, cut into ¼ inch cubes/or shred and set aside separately.

3 tablespoons olive oil
2 large onions, chopped fine, about 3 cups
1 large carrot, peeled and chopped fine, about ½ cup
1 medium green bell pepper, seeded and chopped
½ teaspoon table salt
6 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed, about 2 T.
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
1 ½ tablespoons ground cumin
2 bay leaves
6 cups low sodium chicken broth
1 29-32 oz can diced tomato
8 oz. ham steak or ham hock, trimmed of fat
2 tablespoons cornstarch
2 tablespoons water
2 tablespoons lime juice from 1 or 2 limes

Garnishes:

Lime wedges
Chopped fresh cilantro leaves
Diced avocado
Sour cream
Shredded Cheddar
Serve with corn tortillas wedges.

For the soup:

Heat oil in 8-qt. Dutch oven over medium-high heat until simmering but not smoking; add onions, carrot, bell pepper, and salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are soft and lightly browned, 12 to 15 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low and add garlic, pepper flakes, cumin; cook, stirring constantly until fragrant, about 3 minutes. Stir in beans, bean cooking liquid, chicken broth, and diced tomato. Increase heat to medium-high and bring to boil, then reduce heat to low and simmer uncovered, stirring occasionally, to blend flavors, about 30 minutes.

To finish the soup: Ladle 1 ½ cups beans and 2 cups liquid into bowl of food processor or blender, process until mixture is smooth, and return to pot. (Alternatively, leave soup in pot and puree beans and liquid with a hand blender to desired thickness. Stir together cornstarch and water in small bowl until combined, then gradually stir about half of cornstarch mixture into soup; bring to boil over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, to fully thicken. If soup is still thinner than desired once boiling, stir in remaining cornstarch mixture to recombine and gradually stir mixture into soup; return soup to boil to fully thicken. Off heat, stir in lime juice and reserved ham cubes/shredded ham; ladle soup into bowls and serve immediately, passing garnishes separately.

BLACK BEAN SOUP WITH CHIPOTLE CHILES:

Add 1 T. minced chipotle chilies in adobo plus 2 t. adobo sauce along with chicken broth.