

Canned vs. Dried: A Battle of the Beans to Decide What's Best for You!

In our almost obsessive pursuit of new, delicious recipes the family will enjoy, we've come across several recipes lately that call for dried beans. Dried whites, reds, and pintos, to be specific.

That got us thinking... why the sudden interest in using dried instead of canned? Are there advantages of one type over the other? When should we use one instead of the other?

Let's look at the differences between the two.

Ease of Use

With the canned variety, you simply open a can, rinse them (usually), and add them to the recipe.

Dried legumes require considerably more effort. They must be rinsed, sorted, and depending on the recipe and personal preference, soaked and cooked for an often considerable length of time.

For many of us, this soaking business may not be practical on Tuesday evening after a day at work.

IS SOAKING REALLY NECESSARY?

Talk to any number of cooks and you'll get as many different answers about the necessity of soaking dried legumes before cooking them.

Many cooks [swear by overnight soaks](#), while others say a few hours will do the trick. Still others don't soak at all.

An [exhaustive experiment conducted by Epicurious](#) lead the editors to conclude that adequate reduction in cooking time and sufficient flavor enhancement was gained by bringing the beans to a boil in water, turning the heat off, and letting them soak for just an hour before cooking them for use in a recipe.

Despite Epicurious' recommendation, there is a reason that might lead you to definitely want to soak them for a longer period.

Soaking [reduces the legume's well-known side effect, flatulence](#). This is especially a sensitive issue for those who have [difficulties consuming FODMAP foods](#), like legumes. [According to the University of Michigan](#), soaking them in water with a teaspoon of vinegar for eight to 10 hours will reduce raffinose sugars, which cause intestinal gas.

Be sure to discard the bean soaking water to also get rid of the sugars. And the potential embarrassment.

Even an hour of soaking, as recommended by Epicurious, may not be doable during the workweek. So, for time efficiency, canned may be the way to go in many circumstances.

Which is More Affordable?

Another factor to consider is cost. The dried product costs less than half the price of prepared.

According to a grocery store price review conducted by [The Bean Institute](#) in November 2015, dried pintos cost about \$0.15 per serving, store-brand pintos cost \$0.34 per serving and national-brand pintos cost \$0.48 per serving.

But, really, this particular legume isn't terribly expensive either way, so unless you eat an exorbitant amount of it, cost might not be a critically important factor.

Nutritional Differences

In general, canned legumes are usually higher in sodium and lower in nutrients than dried varieties.

NUTRITIONAL VALUES FOR A 3.5-OUNCE (100G) SERVING OF PINTOS:

NUTRIENT	DRIED	CANNED
Protein	9 g	7 g
Carbohydrates	26 g	22g
Calories	143	114
Folate	172 mcg	24 mcg
Iron	2 mg	1.33 mg
Potassium	436 mg	274 mg

Keep in mind that some of the above nutrient quantities in the dried product — folate in particular — may change depending on cooking methods.

For example, [a study by K. Hoppner and B. Lampi](#) found that folate in dried beans may be reduced when the vitamin interacts with other food components during the cooking process. Additionally, the researchers found that the traditional long soak reduced folate loss as compared to quick soak methods.

So, for women of childbearing age and others for whom folate is important, you may want to do the long-soak method.

Sodium is often added to canned products, so it is a good idea to rinse and drain them before use.

In fact, [a 2011 study](#) by Roberta L. Duyff, John R. Mount, and Joshua B. Jones showed that draining them for two minutes reduced sodium content by 36 percent.

The same study showed that draining plus 10 seconds of rinsing and two additional minutes of draining reduced sodium by 41 percent.

You may also be able to find low or no-sodium products on the shelf.

What Else are They Putting in There?

Other additives are found in the canned product.

These include calcium chloride, which is similar to salt but contains calcium instead of sodium.

Calcium chloride is a firming agent that adds a salty flavor to foods. It can, however, also impart a bitterness and other off-flavors, according to [a study conducted by Thomas Ohlsson in 1994](#), mainly due to the residual chlorine remaining on the surface of the product.

According to the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#), ingesting calcium chloride in the quantities found in food is safe.

Disodium EDTA is another additive commonly found in the canned variety. It is used to as a preservative and to promote color retention.

The FDA has deemed it safe, and though we couldn't find any scientific studies linking small ingestions of disodium EDTA to health concerns, some people have reported gastrointestinal issues and headaches from ingesting the chemical.

Furthermore, the cans in which they are packaged often are lined with a substance containing bisphenol A, also commonly known as BPA.

While the quantities found in these linings are very small, the chemical has been linked to a variety of health problems including cancers and heart disease. It's something many consumers have taken pains to avoid.

Another additive sometimes found in canned beans [is sugar](#).
'Nuff said.

Animal fat may be added for flavor, and other seasonings or vegetables may be added.

Dried varieties, of course, are just that. The package may contain dirt and rocks, but that's why you soak and sort.

If It's All About the Flavor

As we mentioned earlier, some of the additives found in the canned product can alter its flavor, whereas with dried legumes, you have to add all of the flavor enhancements yourself.

A difference many tasters note is that the canned versions tend to be "mushy" whereas home-cooked dried beans are "creamy" — an important distinction foodies can appreciate.

Tasters also sometimes attribute a “tinny” flavor to the pre-prepared legumes.

Try Fresh

Now and then, when they’re in season in late summer or early fall, you can [find fresh beans at the farmers market](#).

These offer the best of both worlds — high nutrition, no additives, and quick cooking.

Since you may be hard-pressed to find recipes calling for fresh varieties, you’ll have to get creative when adapting other recipes.

Obviously, you’ll eliminate the soak time and likely shorten the cook time if you’re substituting fresh for dried. If you’re subbing fresh for canned, you may need to lengthen the cook time a bit.

Some market vendors sell them pre-shelled, and you’ll want to look for firm, smooth, and unwrinkled ones.

For even fresher product, look for those still in the pod. You’ll want pods that are plump, where you can see and feel the lumps. Chefs say it’s okay — even desirable — if the pods are spotted or slightly leathery.

If you’re not using the fresh product immediately, store the pods in a paper bag on the counter (for a few days) or in the refrigerator (up to a week). You can also freeze them.