

Beans and Rice

By Cindy Hudson

I remember coming home from school on winter afternoons and being met at the front door by the aroma of Mama's white beans with ham cooking on the stove. Letting the screen door bang behind me I'd call out, "mmmm, mmmm, white beans for dinner," and follow my nose into the kitchen where Mama was mashing softened beans against the sides of the pot with the back of a stirring spoon. Leaning over, I'd fill myself up with steam rising from the beans then grab a soup spoon and dip it in for a taste to hold me until supertime.

It seemed like forever before Daddy came home from work and we could finally sit down and dig in. I'd ladle a good-sized helping of those beans over steaming, fluffy white rice, pour sweet cane syrup on the side and mix all the flavors together with a bit of bread before popping a perfect bite in my mouth. I cleaned my plate and went back for more until my stomach strained against the waistband of my pants. The first time I set out to make my own pot of beans I was surprised to realize I knew more about eating white beans with ham than cooking them. So I called Mama for a consultation.

"You've got to cook the beans for about an hour before you start to mash them against the sides of the pot," she informed me. "But don't put your ham in until after you've mashed the beans; otherwise it's harder to get the back of the spoon up against the side. Chop your green bell pepper up really fine, and it will cook down to almost nothing. You can also add a little red bell pepper in for color.

"And don't forget to put in a little vegetable oil. That will make your beans creamier."

On days I cook beans now I love it when my own daughter comes in from school and heads straight for the pot and stirs, mashing beans against the side as she does. Then she settles in with homework at the kitchen counter, impatiently waiting until we can serve them up for dinner.

Here's Mama's recipe for White Beans with Ham and Rice, along with my second favorite, Red Beans with Smoked Sausage and Rice. Because red beans are larger, they require a slightly longer cooking time before they soften. Serve either with a salad on the side and cornbread muffins or slices of crispy French bread. If you'd like to try cane syrup you'll probably have to order it. It's my favorite, and I keep shipments coming regularly to my home in Portland. Steen's is the brand I use. Click here to visit the [Steen's website](#).

For Rice:

- 1-1/2 cups white rice
- 3 cups water
- 1 tsp. salt
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To prepare rice, add rice, water and salt to a 4 qt. saucepan. Cover and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes until rice is done.

White Beans and Rice

- 1 lb. navy beans
- 1/8 cup vegetable oil
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 small onion
- 1 lb. ham, chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- 6 cups water
- Salt, black pepper and cayenne pepper to taste

Rinse and sort beans in a large pot. Add 6 cups of cold water and let them soak overnight. Drain and rinse. Heat oil over medium high heat in a large skillet. Sauté bell pepper and onions until soft, about 5 minutes. Scrape into pot with beans and add 6 cups of hot water and bay leaf. Cover, bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for about an hour, until beans are softened. Using the back end of a wooden spoon, stir beans and mash against the side of the pot. Do this until roughly one third of the beans are crushed. Add ham, cover and simmer, stirring occasionally, for another hour. Salt and pepper to taste.

Ladle beans and ham over steaming white rice to serve.

Red Beans and Rice

- 1 lb. red kidney beans
- 1/8 cup vegetable oil
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 small onion
- 1 lb. smoked sausage, cut into chunks
- 1 bay leaf
- 6 cups water
- Salt, black pepper and cayenne pepper to taste

Rinse and sort beans in a large pot. Add 6 cups of cold water and let them soak overnight. Drain and rinse. Heat oil over medium high heat in a large skillet. Sauté bell pepper and onions until soft, about 5 minutes. Scrape into pot with beans and add 6 cups of hot water and bay leaf. Cover, bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for about an hour and a half, until beans are softened. Using the back end of a wooden spoon, stir beans and mash against the side of the pot. Do this until roughly one third of the beans are crushed. Fry the smoked sausage in a separate skillet until browned. Add sausage to beans, cover and simmer, stirring occasionally, for another hour. Salt and pepper to taste.

To serve, ladle beans and sausage over steaming white rice.