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Legume Varieties

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Unless a person is willing to spend a great deal of money on preserved meats, a food storage program not including a quantity of legumes is simply incomplete. There are few non-animal foods that contain the amount of protein to be found in dried beans, peas, and lentils. The varieties commonly available in this country have protein contents ranging from 20%-35%. As with most non-animal proteins, they are not complete in themselves for purposes of human nutrition, but become so when they are combined with the incomplete proteins found in grains. It is for this reason that grains and legumes are so often mentioned together. In cultures all over the world, it is common to find the two served together at a meal, making a complete protein, even when those doing the serving have no understanding of nutrition at all.



The legume family, of which all beans, peas, lentils, and peanuts are a part of, is one of the largest in the plant kingdom. Because of this and the many



thousands of years of development and cultivation that man has given them, the variety of edible legumes available to us is huge. Both the appearance and the names of legume varieties are colorful and varied. The names range from "adzuki" beans, a type of soybean from the Orient, to "zipper" peas, a commonly found field pea here in the Southern U.S. The color of the beans can range from a clean white, to deep red, dull green to flat black with thousands of mixtures and patterns of colors. In spite of this incredible variety of names and colors, legumes are largely interchangeable in cooking usage, although some dishes just wouldn't be the same if a different type was used. Below is a partial list of some of the more commonly eaten bean varieties here in the U.S.

Black Beans

Also known as turtle beans, these small, dark-brownish black, oval-shaped beans are well known in Cuban black bean soup. They are very commonly used in Central and South America and in China. They tend to bleed very darkly when cooked so they are not well suited to being combined with other beans, lest they give the entire pot a muddy appearance.

Black-Eyed Pea

Although there is tremendous variation among the many varieties of field peas eaten throughout the Southern United States, it is black-eyed peas that are the most commonly known nationwide. The coloring of field peas is as varied as the rest of the legume family, with black-eyed peas being small and oval-shaped with an overall creamy color and, of course, their distinctive black-eye. Dried field peas cook very quickly and combine very tastily with either rice or cornbread.

Chickpeas

Also known as the garbanzo bean or ceci pea (or bean), it tends to be a creamy or tan color, rather lumpily roundish and larger than dried garden peas. Many have eaten chickpeas, even if they've never seen a whole one. They are the prime ingredient in hummus and falafel and are one of the oldest cultivated legume species known, going back as far as 5400 B.C. in the Near East.

Kidney Beans

Just like the rest of the family, kidney beans can be found in wide variety. They come in both light and dark red color in their distinctive kidney shape. Probably best known here in the U.S. for their use in chili, they figure prominently in Mexican, Brazilian and Chinese cuisine.

Lentils

Lentils are an odd lot. They don't fit in with either the beans or the peas and occupy a place by themselves. Their shape is different from the other legumes being roundish little discs with colors ranging from muddy brown, to green to a rather bright orangish-red. They cook very quickly compared to the larger beans and have a distinctive flavor. They are much used in Far Eastern cuisine from Indian to Chinese.

Lima Beans

In the Southern U.S., they are also commonly called butter beans. They are one of the most common beans found in this country in all manner of preservation from the young small beans to the large fully mature type. Their flavor is pleasant, but a little bland. Their shape is rather flat and broad with colors ranging from pale green to speckled cream and purple.

Peanuts

The peanut, commonly known outside the U.S. as the groundnut, is not actually a nut at all, but a legume. Peanuts are another odd species not much like the more familiar beans and peas. Whatever their their classification they are certainly not unfamiliar to U.S. eaters. Peanuts have a high protein percentage and even more fat. They are one of the two legume species commonly grown for oilseed in this country, and are also used for peanut butter, boiled and roasted peanuts. Many Central and South American, African and Chinese dishes incorporate peanuts so they are useful for much more than just a snack food or cooking oil.



Pinto Beans

Anyone who has eaten Tex-Mex food has probably had the pinto bean. It is one of the most commonly eaten beans in the U.S., particularly in the Southwestern portion of the country. Stereotypically bean shaped, it has a dappled pattern of

tans and browns on its shell. Pintos have a flavor that blends well with many foods. When ground together with white or navy beans they make my favorite home-made version of falafel.

Soybeans

An entire university could be founded on the culinary and industrial uses of the soybean. It is by far the legume with the highest protein content in commercial production as well as being the other legume oilseed producer alongside the peanut. The beans themselves are small, and round with a multitude of different shades. Although the U.S. grows a very large percentage of the global supply of these beans, we actually consume virtually none of them directly. Most of them go into cattle feed, are used by industry or exported. What does get eaten directly has usually been processed in some form or fashion. Soybean products range from tofu, to tempeh, to textured vegetable protein and hundreds of other uses. Although they are very high in protein, they don't lend themselves well to just being boiled until done and eaten the way other beans and peas do. For this reason, if you plan on keeping some as a part of your storage program (and you should) you would be well served to begin to learn how to process and prepare them *now* when you're not under pressure to produce. That way you can throw out your mistakes and order pizza, rather than having to choke them down, regardless.

[Captain Dave Editorial Note: If beans play an important part of your food storage program -- as they should -- you should accustom your body to eating and digesting them now. Mix them into your diet slowly to avoid some interesting side effects on your digestive system. Find out which ones you like and can digest the best before you stock up on 200 pounds of a single variety.]

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