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**Contact:** Denise Sullivan  
Nutrition & Health Education Specialist  
MU Extension-Jackson County  
816-482-5850  
[sullivanand@missouri.edu](mailto:sullivanand@missouri.edu)

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## **Plants on Your Plate—Dried Beans**

During the cold winter months, turning to canned, dried or frozen vegetables and fruits is still a good way to get more plants on your plate. In fact, many dried legumes or their canned counterparts often make their way to hearty, cold weather meals.

Legumes are a unique food, which includes beans like kidney, pinto, lima, garbanzo and black beans, black-eyed peas, split peas and lentils. Legumes are an excellent source of plant protein, as well as iron and zinc, making them an excellent alternative to meat for meeting protein needs. However, legumes also count as part of the vegetable group because of their abundance of dietary fiber and nutrients like folate, magnesium and potassium. Regardless of which food group you classify them, legumes are a good addition to anyone's diet.

Protein found in legumes is beneficial in building and repairing muscle tissue. Legumes are also rich in complex carbohydrates, containing both insoluble and soluble fiber, beneficial in digestive health, heart health and insulin resistance. Beans also contain complex sugars called oligosaccharides, which are non-digestible, fermentable fibers, which research is revealing to be beneficial for gut health and other health conditions.

Certainly, the most economical way to purchase legumes is in the dried form. A ½-cup serving of dried beans is about one-third the cost of canned beans. Preparing

dried beans is a simple process, but does take some lead-time. *First*, spread beans on a large tray and pick out any foreign objects like small stems or stones, as well as any broken beans. *Next*, place in a colander and rinse under cold running water. The *third* step is soaking, either with the cold-water overnight method or a hot soak, which involves boiling for two to three minutes before soaking for four or more hours. Whichever soaking method is used, the water should be drained and fresh water added for the *final* step of cooking. Using fresh water for cooking reduces much of the gas-causing carbohydrates. As the beans rehydrate, additional water is often needed during cooking. Herbs and spices can be added anytime during cooking and some studies show that bay leaf reduces uncomfortable gas. Acidic ingredients like tomato products or wine should be added near the end of cooking, as they can interfere with the tenderness of beans.

A pressure cooker is another great alternative to preparing dry beans quickly. Combining pressure and heat dramatically reduces cooking time by about one-third of the time. Check your appliance manual for specific directions.

Lentils and split peas are great choices for beginners, because they do not require soaking before cooking. With these legumes, simply remove any foreign debris, rinse and cook according to recipe directions.

If you do choose the convenience of canned beans, it is a good idea to look for low or no sodium options to help stay in line with current general dietary recommendations of 2300 milligrams of sodium per day. If there is not a reduced sodium option, draining and rinsing the beans can reduce sodium amounts significantly. A 2009 study conducted at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, showed that draining beans removes, on average, 36% of the sodium in canned beans. Draining and rinsing removes, on average, 41% of the sodium.

The recipe below is tasty with any type of bean; however, black beans and black-eyed peas are my favorites. If you missed your 'good luck' dose of black-eyed peas on New Year's Day, go a head and sneak them in now!

## Cowboy Caviar

(makes 10 ½ cup servings)

- 1 Tablespoon canola oil
- 1 Tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 1 Tablespoon lime juice
- ½ teaspoon cumin (optional)
- 1 (15 oz can) black eye peas, drained and rinsed
- ¾ cup frozen corn
- ½ cup chopped onion
- ½ cup chopped bell pepper
- 1 cup chopped tomatoes
- 1 avocado, diced

1. Wash hands and work surfaces before food preparation.
2. Wash all produce.
3. In a small bowl, whisk oil, vinegar, lime juice and cumin together.
4. In a medium bowl, combine black-eyed peas, corn, onion, pepper, and tomatoes.
5. Pour vinegar mixture over vegetables. Cover and chill until serving.
6. Add avocado before serving and stir gently to combine.
7. Serve with tortilla chips or crackers as a dip, or on top of leafy greens as a salad.

**Nutrition information:** Calories: 90, Total Fat: 4g, Saturated Fat: 0g, Sodium: 65mg, Carbohydrates: 12g, Fiber: 5g, Protein: 3g

Recipe adapted from Seasonal and Simple, analyzed by verywellfit.com



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