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Plants on Your Plate—Green Beans

Snap beans, string beans or green beans...different names for the same product. Older plant varieties had a fibrous 'string' that ran the length of the bean, hence the name. Through modern plant breeding, newer varieties tend not to have this string. The name snap bean became popular due to the sound made when picking and preparing for cooking.

Green beans are the second most common home garden plant, right behind tomatoes. Green beans are classified as pole or bush varieties, and both will yield the same nutritious product, though pole beans may require slightly different maintenance in needing a pole or trellis to support their growth. Originating in Peru, green beans were shared through south and central America via migrating Indian tribes. Native Americans would plant pole beans as part of the three sisters planting process, where corn stalks would provide the structure for the beans to climb, while squash plants would provide shade to the roots to retain moisture.

When selecting fresh green beans, look for a bright, vivid color and a velvety feel and firm texture. Don't choose limp, split or oversized beans that are bulging, as the seed pods inside will make the beans tough and potentially produce that fibrous string. Fresh beans can be stored in a plastic bag in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator for 3-5 days. Trim away any insect or 'rust' spots as you prepare your beans.

Green beans have always been one of my favorite garden-fresh vegetables and one that I was most actively involved harvesting as a child. I didn't exactly enjoy bending over the long rows planted in our family garden, or snapping the ends to prepare for a meal, but I did enjoy the

simple goodness of a pot of fresh cooked green beans, seasoned with onion and a bit of ham or bacon. Add in some fresh new potatoes, with a side of sliced tomatoes, and that was a common summertime dinner all by itself. Like most vegetables, green beans are a low-calorie choice and are a good source of vitamins C and K, as well as potassium, magnesium and fiber.

If you have an abundance of green beans, they can be frozen, canned or pickled, though canning supplies have been in limited supply in many areas. Growing up, we pressure canned most of our green beans plain, but over the years, I have become more fond of pickled dilly beans. The recipe below, from Seasonal and Simple has a similar flavor as dilly beans and makes a tasty side dish for a late-summer picnic.

Dilled Green Bean Salad (makes 5 servings)

1-pound fresh green beans, ends trimmed and cut into 2-inch pieces
2 tablespoons fresh chopped dill
4-6 green onions, chopped
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
Dash of hot sauce (optional)

Steam green beans over boiling water for 5 minutes, until tender-crisp. Stir together beans, dill and onions in a bowl. In a separate bowl or small jar, combine oil, vinegar, mustard and hot sauce and whisk or shake to combine. Pour over bean mixture and mix well. Chill for at least 30 minutes before serving.

Nutrition information: Calories: 84, Total Fat: 5.5g, Saturated Fat: >1g, Sodium: 16mg, Carbohydrates: 8g, Fiber: 3.5g, Protein: 2.5g
Recipe adapted from Seasonal and Simple, analyzed by verywellfit.com



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