

## MEATLESS MONDAY MEALS

### Beans...Some Things to Know

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#### Substituting Canned for Dried

Most recipes that call for dried beans are soups or stews that require the beans to cook slowly with the other ingredients so that they release their starches and thicken the dish. When you replace the dried beans with canned beans and shorten the cooking time (cooking canned beans for the same amount of time as dried beans would cause the beans to disintegrate), you sacrifice both the flavor and texture of the finished dish. On some occasions (such as for a salad or quick pasta dish), a recipe might call for dried beans to be cooked, drained, and then added. In these instances, you can safely substitute canned beans. A general rule of thumb is that 1 cup of dried beans equals 3 cups of canned beans.



#### The Science of Salt-Soaking Beans

When you soak dried beans in salted water, they cook up with softer skins and are less likely to blow out and disintegrate. Why? It has to do with how the sodium ions in salt interact with the cells of the bean skins. As the beans soak, the sodium ions replace some of the calcium and magnesium ions in the skins. Because sodium ions are more weakly charged than calcium and magnesium ions, they allow more water to penetrate into the skins, leading to a softer texture. During soaking, the sodium ions will filter only partway into the beans, so their greatest effect is on the cells in the outermost part of the beans. Softening the skins also makes them less likely to split as the beans cook, keeping the beans intact. For 1 pound of dried beans, dissolve 3 tablespoons of table salt in 4 quarts of cold water. Soak the beans at room temperature for 8 to 24 hours. Drain and rinse them well before using.



#### For a Quick Salt-Soak

If you are pressed for time you can “quick-soak” your beans. Simply combine the salt, water, and beans in a large Dutch oven and bring to a boil over high heat. Remove the pot from the heat, cover, and let stand for 1 hour. Drain and rinse the beans well before using.

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### Getting to Know Rice

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A grain of rice is made up of endosperm, germ, bran, and a husk. Brown rice is simply husked; white rice also has the germ and bran removed. This makes the rice cook faster and softer, but also removes much of the nutrients, as well as flavor.



#### Long-grain white rice

This broad category includes generic long-grain rice as well as aromatic varieties such as basmati, texmati, and jasmine. The grains are slender and cook up light, fluffy, and distinct, making them good for pilafs and salads.



#### Medium-grain white rice

This category includes rices used to make risotto (arborio) and paella (Valencia), as well as many Japanese and Chinese varieties. The grains are fat and cook up a bit sticky, and when simmered, they clump together.



#### Short-grain white rice

The grains of short-grain rice are almost round, and the texture is quite sticky and soft when cooked. Most of us are familiar with short-grain rice through its use in sushi.



#### Brown rice

As with white rice, brown rice comes in a variety of grain sizes: short, medium, and long. Long-grain brown rice, the best choice for pilafs, cooks up fluffy, with separate grains. Medium-grain brown rice is a bit more sticky, perfect for risotto, paella, and similar dishes. Short-grain brown rice is the most sticky, ideal for sushi and other Asian dishes.



#### Basmati rice

Prized for its nutty flavor and sweet aroma, basmati rice is eaten in pilafs and biryanis and with curries. Indian basmati is aged for a minimum of one year before being packaged. This dehydrates the rice so that, once cooked, it expands greatly.



#### Red rice

Red rice is a special variety of rice with a red husk rather than the more common brown. It is usually unhulled or partially hulled and has a high nutritional value and a nutty flavor.



#### Black rice

Like brown rice, black rice is sold unhulled. But only black rice contains anthocyanins, the same antioxidant compounds in blueberries and blackberries. These compounds are what turn the rice a deep purple as it cooks.