

COMMON BEAN

Scientific Name: *Phaseolus vulgaris*

Common Name: Common, Green, Dry, Kidney, Black, Pinto, etc.

Dakota Name: Omnica

Ojibwe Name: Miskodiisimin

Other:

INTRODUCTION

Common beans are a highly diverse plant species that include many varieties, such as green, kidney, black, and pinto beans. Beans come in climbing and bush varieties, with trifoliate (three-parted) leaves and long pods filled with seeds (beans). Depending on the variety, beans can be eaten fresh as green beans or left to mature and dry for storage. Although initially domesticated in Mexico, Central America, and the Andean region, they are now grown worldwide.

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ECOLOGY

Bean plants prefer full sun, well-drained soil with moderate moisture, and warm temperatures between 60-85°F. They are annual plants and complete their life cycle in one growing season. They have a shallow root system that forms nitrogen-fixing nodules, thus enhancing soil fertility while supporting their growth. Indigenous peoples have long valued various bean varieties as part of the "Three Sisters" agricultural system, where beans are grown alongside maize and squash to support soil fertility and maximize yield. This symbiotic planting method has sustained generations and highlights the vital role of beans in Indigenous foodways, traditions, and nutrition.



HISTORY

Indigenous peoples have cultivated beans for thousands of years. The Dakota and Ojibwe have grown many bean varieties suited to their lands, ensuring food security and sustainability. Beans have also been a vital trade item, exchanged among different Indigenous nations. Today, Indigenous farmers continue to preserve heirloom bean varieties, passing down agricultural knowledge and strengthening cultural ties to the land.



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TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Beans are key to Indigenous agriculture and food traditions. The Dakota and Ojibwe have long cultivated beans as a nutritious and sustainable food source. Beans are often included in ceremonial meals and are considered an essential part of community feasts. Beans are highly nutritious, providing protein, fiber, and essential vitamins. Traditional knowledge recognizes beans as a sustaining food that promotes strength and energy. Some Indigenous communities use bean leaves and pods in herbal remedies for digestion and overall health.

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FORAGING AND HARVESTING




Although wild bean species exist, common Beans are cultivated rather than foraged in the wild. Green beans are harvested while the pods are tender and before the seeds fully develop. Dry beans are left on the plant until the pods turn brown and brittle, then collected for storage. Traditional Indigenous farming methods emphasize gratitude, and offerings of tobacco, songs, and prayers are often made before harvesting to honor the plant's gift of nourishment.

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PRESERVATION




6 Green beans can be eaten fresh or preserved by canning, freezing, or drying. Dried green beans are still a delicacy for many southern tribes. They are often referred to as "leather britches," referring to the leathery but silky texture of the green beans after they are reconstituted in hot water. Dry beans are harvested, shelled, and stored in a cool, dry place for long-term use. Indigenous farmers have historically dried beans in the sun and stored them in clay pots, parfleche, or woven bags to protect them from moisture and pests. Proper storage ensures that beans remain a reliable food source throughout the winter and that seeds can be saved for the next growing season.

COMMON THREATS



7 Pests such as bean beetles, aphids, and cutworms can affect common bean plants. Traditional Indigenous farming practices, like companion planting and crop rotation, help control these pests naturally. Beans are also susceptible to fungal diseases such as rust and root rot, which can be managed by ensuring good air circulation and avoiding excessive watering. Healthy soil and diverse planting strategies contribute to resilient bean crops.

CULINARY USES

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- Green Beans: Eaten fresh, steamed, stir-fried, or added to soups and stews.
 - Kidney Beans, Black Beans, Pinto Beans, and Other Dry Beans: Used in traditional dishes like soups, stews, and succotash. Dry beans must be soaked and cooked before eating.
 - Flour from Dry Beans: Some varieties are ground into flour for thickening soups or making bread.