

Beans and Cornbread

by Virginia L. Maples



There wasn't a lot of varieties of meats around the supper table at our house as I was growing up. This was post-WWII and Daddy was in the Army, rank of 1st Sgt, which was good, but still very low pay for the times and the economy.

During the first part of the month, we might be able to have some real "meaty" dishes but as the end of the month approached, the pantry shelf and the freezer section of the refrigerator got lower and there were a lot of meatless meals on the table. Daddy loved beans and cornbread, with sliced onions alongside and Mama made all kinds; pinto beans, black-eyed peas, dried white lima beans, navy beans, etc. Basically, the recipe is the same for all, with a little seasoning variety and that is the recipe I will be sharing but the reason for this simple recipe being included is the story I have to go with it.

When I was around four, we were living in a trailer park at the time, I went in and asked Mama what we were having for supper.

"Beans and cornbread" was her reply. Then I started my little "fit."

"I don't want beans anymore. I'm sick and tired of them old beans! I want some good food." Mama gave me the patient and understanding remarks I had heard before, all about how good beans were for you and how she would get me a hamburger next week and how much Daddy liked beans.

"I don't care, I don't want any beans, Daddy can have all the beans he wants, I'm just not going to stay here and eat them old beans, I'm going to run away and find me a place to live where they have good food." All this was accompanied by tears, stomping of feet and all the other little extra's that a 4-year-old "drama queen" can add.

Of course, what I really wanted was Mama to say, "that's OK baby, Mama will make you something else." But no, my Mama was pretty smart and knew it was time to put a stop to this nonsense. So, without a word, she went in and got a big tablecloth, took it in my room, put some of my clothes, shoes, and toys in it, tied it up in a bundle, got my coat, put it on me, handed me the bundle, opened the door of the trailer, helped me down the steps, and said,

"Let us know when you get settled in your new home and we will write you letters" and actually, SHUT THE DOOR!

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I stood there in a total daze wondering what in the world had just happened and then the tears really started. I actually didn't have anywhere to go except next door to some friends of ours, and there I went, dragging my bundle of clothes behind me. Of course, Mama was watching from the window to see what I was doing but I didn't know that at the time. I knocked on the neighbor's trailer door and when she answered I told her Mama had got mad at me and kicked me out and could I come live with her. She said, "Sure come on in" and helped me out of my coat, took the bundle, and told me to have a seat at the table.

I managed to get my eyes dried with a napkin she gave me and when she asked me what happened I started in on some farfetched tale on how I was a poor mistreated little girl who was starving 'cause Mama wouldn't give me anything to eat. I later found out that Mama had called her on the phone when she saw where I was headed and had already filled her in on the real scoop of what had happened, so when I asked what she was fixing for supper, her response was "beans and cornbread."

With that bit of information, I started crying all over again, and when she asked me why I was crying, I said cause if all the world is going to be eating beans tonight then I should have just stayed home, I miss my Mama and I want to go back and live with her again but now she is mad at me and I can't go home. The neighbor called Mama on the phone and told her, "Ginny wants to come home is that ok?" and naturally, Mama said sure and came and got me. I met her at the door, all crying and telling her how sorry I was and how much I loved her, and I never wanted to ever live anywhere else but with her and Daddy and please don't tell Daddy I don't like his beans!

I can't eat any kind of beans and cornbread without thinking of how wise she was to handle the situation the way she did. It worked like a charm and I never complained about what we were having for supper ever again. It was a lesson very well learned.

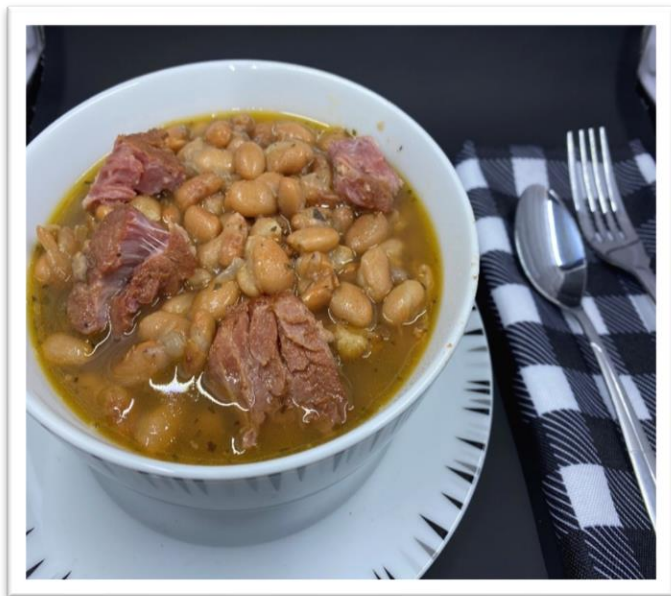


Photo by J.D. Moss

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what makes it
great!

1 lb. dry beans.

4-6 cups water.

2 large ham hocks.

1 lg. onion, chopped.

2 teaspoon salt.

2-3 cloves garlic.

Other seasoning choices

2 stalks celery, chopped

1 Tablespoon cilantro

4 slices of bacon

1 Tablespoon parsley flakes

1 teaspoon basil

1 teaspoon thyme

1 bay leaf

1/2 teaspoon of Cayenne

The wonder of beans!

Use any dried beans and soak them in water for a couple of hours before cooking.

The Beans

In large pot, put in 4 to 6 cups water, 2 large ham hocks, 1 chopped onion, 2 teaspoons salt, ½ teaspoon pepper, 2 or 3 cloves of garlic - finely chopped or use a teaspoon of garlic powder. Let the water come to a boil and then reduce the heat to medium high.

Take the beans you have been soaking, drain the water and add them to the pot. Cook until the beans are tender, adding water as needed.

When the beans are tender remove the ham hocks before you serve them. You can leave the meat that was on the bones.

Seasoning can vary based on the beans used.

Black eyed peas: Add a little chopped celery or celery flakes to the water.

White beans: Add a little red pepper and some cilantro.

Split peas: Use some bacon and fry until crisp. Use the bacon fat to sauté the onions and garlic before adding them to the water.

Mama was never afraid to try different spices and seasonings to give a them a little variety because they had to be served so often.

The Cornbread

For the Cornbread recipe see:

Skillet Cornbread