



Boston Baked Beans

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The Northeast is a diverse region whose major cities have distinct food cultures of their own. Boston, or “Bean Town,” is one such city. Residents of the aptly named town have long enjoyed the sweet, tangy flavor of slow cook baked beans along with hotdogs, lobster rolls, and other regional favorites. The dish has roots in indigenous cooking practices and was deeply influenced by trans-Atlantic trade in the colonial period. In this period, Boston became an exporter of rum. Molasses, a key ingredient in Boston Baked Beans, is also a key ingredient in the rum distillation process. This important ingredient gives the baked beans their rich, mildly sweet flavor. If you’re looking for a great side for your next picnic in the park, tailgate, or meal, try out this classic Northeastern side. Make sure to remove the lid in the final stage of cooking to allow the beans to caramelize on the surface!

Boston Baked Beans

Ingredients

2 pounds dried white or navy beans
½ cup unsulfured molasses
1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon dry mustard
½ cup packed dark-brown sugar
1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 large onion, peeled, and diced
12 ounces salt pork or bacon
5 cups water, possibly more, as needed during baking

Directions

Soak the beans overnight in water in a large bowl. Make sure the water level is at least 2 or 3 inches above the bean level to allow for absorption. Drain in a colander and remove any debris, discolored beans or empty shells. Soaking overnight greatly reduces the cooking time required.

Heat oven to 300 degrees—this mimics the low heat of the communal oven at the end of the day. Boston Baked Beans were typically cooked overnight in the low heat of the oven at the end of the day. In a small bowl, combine molasses, mustard, brown sugar, pepper, onions and 5 cups water. Do not add salt until the beans are cooked. Adding salt too early will prevent the beans from becoming tender. Bring this mixture to a boil and whisk until the sugar has dissolved.

Score the salt pork ¼-inch-deep, 1 inch apart, and slice into two even pieces. Transfer to the bean pot. Add the soaked beans. Pour the molasses mixture over beans, stir, and cover. The liquid should cover the beans by 1/2 inch. Add more water if necessary.

Transfer to oven to bake until the beans are tender and the liquid has thickened about 6 hours. Check the beans every 45 minutes, adding more hot water if necessary to keep beans in broth at all times. For the last 50 to 60 minutes of cooking, uncover beans. At this stage, if you are having hot dogs or sausages with your beans, you can add them into the pot to heat inside with the beans, optional. The objective in this final stage of cooking the bean uncovered is to achieve a caramelized glaze or crust on the surface of the beans.

Once the beans are to your desired tenderness, remove from oven, adjust the seasoning with salt, pepper and molasses, if necessary. A splash of vinegar to finish will make the flavors pop. Since Navy beans are relatively high in starch, the sauce will thicken slightly as it cools.



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