

# Indigenous Food Hubs

## 2026 Harvest of the Month



### MARCH: BEANS

#### CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Beans have been an agricultural cornerstone for Indigenous communities across North America for over 4,000 years. Cultivated by numerous tribes ranging from the Woodland tribes to the Southwest, beans became a staple for nutrition, trade, and cultural practices.

Four major bean species were domesticated in the Americas: common bean, tepary bean, lima bean, and runner bean, each regionally significant.

#### THE THREE SISTERS

Central to the iconic Three Sisters planting method — beans, maize (corn), and squash — this companion technique was practiced widely by the Haudenosaunee, Cherokee, Ojibwe, and other tribes. Beans enrich the soil with nitrogen, support corn stalks, and complement squash for moisture retention. The Three Sisters are not only agricultural partners but also spiritual figures in many Indigenous myths, embodying cooperation and respect among plants and people. Corn, beans, and squash are considered three sacred sisters who live together and support one another. Corn stands tall, beans climb her stalk for support, and squash spreads wide to protect the soil. This story teaches cooperation and balance in both agriculture and community life.

#### STORIES AND SYMBOLS

- The Bean Clan exists within some tribes, such as the Hopi (Murzibusi) and Eastern Woodlands tribes like the Lenape, Shawnee, and Iroquois, appearing in dances and ceremonies.
- Tohono O’odham Tepary Bean Story: The white tepary beans are associated with stars in the night sky, symbolizing resilience and survival in harsh desert conditions. They were considered a sacred food that could endure drought, much like the people themselves.

#### NUTRITION AND FUN FACTS

##### Beans: the nutritional powerhouses!

- Great source of protein: Beans help build and repair muscles. A half cup has about 6–15 grams of protein.
- Lots of fiber: Fiber keeps your digestion healthy, helps you feel full longer, and can lower cholesterol. Daily fiber recommendations range from 25-35 grams. Beans provide 7–15g per cup.
- Packed with vitamins and minerals: folate (for healthy cells), iron (for strong blood), and magnesium and potassium (for energy and heart health), among others.
- Heart-healthy plant compounds: Beans have natural antioxidants that protect your heart, help keep blood sugar steady, and support a healthy weight.
- Low in fat and no cholesterol!
- Over 50 Indigenous bean varieties were cultivated historically, tailored to distinct climates and ecosystems.
- Traditionally, beans were dried for year-round storage, enabling food security through winter.
- Some tribes, like the Iroquois and Shawnee perform a Bean Dance, to celebrate planting and harvesting.
- The Cherokee Trail of Tears beans were carried via seed through forced displacement and preserved for generations, symbolizing resilience.
- Example of a traditional dish: Maple-baked beans flavored with indigenous maple syrup and kombu, reflecting Northeast culinary heritage.



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## RECIPE FOR CHEROKEE-STYLE SUCCOTASH



#### COOK TIME

With dried beans: ~9–12 hours

With canned beans: ~25 minutes



#### SERVINGS

4 to 6

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups dried lima beans (or black-eyed peas) or 3 cups canned beans (rinsed and drained)
- 2 cups fresh or canned corn
- 1 bell pepper, diced
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1–2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- Salt & pepper to taste



#### DIFFICULTY:

EASY  MEDIUM  HARD

### DIRECTIONS

1. If using dried beans:
  - a. Soak beans overnight (8–12 hours).
  - b. Drain, then place in a pot with fresh water. Simmer for 60–90 minutes until tender. Drain and set aside. (Skip this step if using canned beans.)
2. Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat.
3. Sauté onion and garlic until softened (about 3–4 minutes).
4. Add bell pepper and cook for 2–3 minutes.
5. Stir in corn and beans. Season with thyme, salt, and pepper.
6. Cook over low heat for about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until flavors blend.
7. Serve warm or at room temperature.

### QUICK TIPS

- Time-saver: Use canned beans to cut prep time to under 30 minutes. Or soak dried beans to reduce cooking time and improve digestibility.
- Flavor boost: Add fresh herbs or a splash of broth while simmering for extra depth. Or slow cook, as in succotash or baked beans, to enhance the flavor.
- Complete protein: Pair with cornbread or rice for a balanced meal.



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