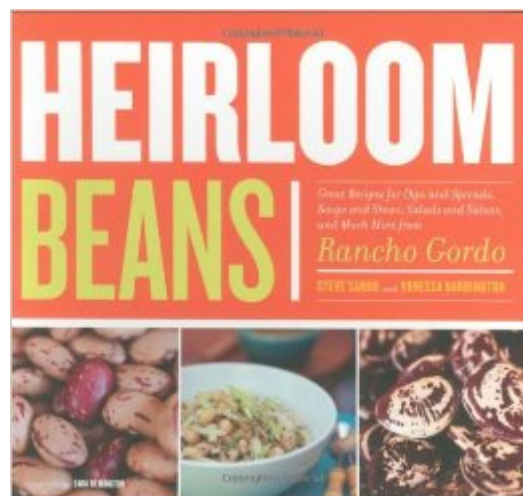


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Heirloom Beans: Great Recipes For Dips And Spreads, Soups And Stews, Salads And Salsas, And Much More From Rancho Gordo



Synopsis

Who would have thought a simple bean could do so much? Heirloom bean expert Steve Sando provides descriptions of the many varieties now available, from Scarlet Runners to the spotted Eye of the Tiger beans. Nearly 90 recipes in the book will entice readers to cook up bowls of heartwarming Risotto and Cranberry Beans with Pancetta, or Caribbean Black Bean Soup. Close-up photos of the beans make them easy to identify. Packed with protein, fiber, and vitamins, these little treasures are the perfect addition to any meal.

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Customer Reviews

I first discovered Rancho Gordo a couple of years ago at the San Francisco Ferry Terminal Market. I'd gotten bored with vendor after vendor selling heirloom tomatoes, tree-ripened fruit, and wild greens. I love all those things, but I needed a source of protein. And then I spotted the Rancho Gordo booth. Rancho Gordo's booth had dozens of varieties of beans: black midnight beans, anasazi beans, eye of the goat, and many more. I took a chance on a few pounds of heirloom beans. The beans were delicious, but I couldn't figure out what to do with them except cooking them with a bay leaf and a little mirepoix. This works really well for black beans, but doesn't seem to be the best choice for chestnut limas. And that's what excited me about this book. Heirloom Beans is a pretty, well produced cookbook about beans. It contains basic information about dozens of varieties of beans (though it omits a few popular varieties of heirlooms like pebble beans), and has many recipes that show off the properties of each variety. Most (I would guess three quarters) of the recipes in this book are Mexican, Southwestern, or South American. The remainder are Italian,

French, and Spanish. Most of the recipes appear to be clearly written and straightforward, and don't use too many unusual ingredients. My local Whole Foods has several varieties of heirloom beans (from different producers), and I've seen some others at Italian or Mexican specialty stores; I assume that most readers will be able to find some of the beans mentioned in this book. In my experience, it is worth seeking out good quality beans. Plain black beans from the supermarket (even organic ones) can be a little dull and flat, and better beans can make a big difference in a recipe. (Even the fanciest beans are still one of the cheapest sources of protein that you can find.)

Most of the recipes in this book also appear straightforward; almost all of them just involve chopping a few vegetables and simmering some beans. (The one problem I have with the directions in this book is that bean cooking requires a little practice, and each variety cooks a little differently. Some beans are finished in a couple hours, while others need a lot more time. The book tells you this, but it doesn't tell you that it's a good idea to taste beans when you think they're done to make sure that they're really cooked through.) Interestingly, this cookbook was published by Chronicle Books, and suffers from some of the same problems as other titles from this publisher. (For example, *The San Francisco Ferry Plaza Farmer's Market Cookbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Impeccable Produce Plus Seasonal Recipes* or *Simply Organic: A Cookbook for Sustainable, Seasonal, and Local Ingredients*.) The book is very pretty: it is nicely laid out and has beautifully printed photographs. Unfortunately, it's a slightly impractical cookbook. The typeface is a little small (and I'm a 35 year old with good eyesight!), the pages are made of coated paper (so you can't easily write down notes in pencil), and the book is paperback (so it won't stand up to heavy use.) I'm excited about this book, and am looking forward to trying a few of the recipes. I will update this review after I've had a chance to test the recipes in this book. (You can't fairly review a cookbook until you know if the recipes work.) I'd recommend it to anyone who likes beans and is looking for more ways to add them to their diet.

[Update on 11/3/2008. I've now had this book for a few weeks, and have had the chance to make a few recipes. I made the Mayacoba Bean, Fennel, and Raddichio salad, the Boston Baked Beans, and the Good Mother Stallard Chicken Pot Pie. I'm glad to say that the recipes work. Everything I made was fairly easy and came out as advertised. By the way, there is no reason that you have to use the exact types of beans specified in this book. If you can't find a Good Mother Stallard bean, for example, just use another bean with a similar texture. I actually made the baked beans recipe with Pebble Beans (which aren't even mentioned in the book), instead of Navy beans. For some recipes, it's better to pick a bean with a similar consistency or size, but don't be afraid to experiment. Additionally, I sell some of the beans mentioned in this book: *Gourmet Valley Heirloom Beans Runner Canellini Beans, 12-Ounce Pouches (Pack of 6)*, *Gourmet Valley Heirloom*

Beans Red Calypso Beans, 12-Ounce Pouches (Pack of 6), andÂ Gourmet Valley Heirloom Beans Es Eye Of The Goat, 12-Ounce Pouch (Pack of 6).]

Heirloom Beans by Steven Sando, the founder of Rancho Gordo, a food company, and food writer Vanessa Barrington, is on a mission to make beans--especially heirloom beans--cool in America. This is not an easy task, the authors point out, in spite of the fact that beans have been a heralded staple internationally. For some reason, Americans embrace the less nutritive and complex tasting corn but eschew beans. Sadly, Americans shy away from beans as beans are synonymous with the embarrassing digestive fiascos (perhaps Blazing Saddles did more than any cultural event to demonize beans). But Steve Sando has a solution: Eat lots of beans all the time and your digestive system will adapt. Sando is not pushing beans because they are rich in nutrients and fiber. He is not pushing beans because since eating them daily his good cholesterol has gone up and his bad cholesterol has gone down. He is pushing beans because they are an amazing side dish or main entrÃ©e. I knew this from watching Mario Batali on the television make mouth-watering Italian-style fava beans, but in Heirloom Beans, you learn how to prepare appetizers, snacks, soups, stews, chilies, salads, side dishes, main dishes, and casseroles with heirloom beans. This book does not champion all beans. Non-heirloom beans such as kidneys, great northern, and limas, Sando writes, are cheap but "boring." In contrast, heirloom beans are tastier, more complex, and, due to their artisan growers, fresher. The book includes a list, accompanied by beautiful photos, of over 30 heirloom beans. Sando is not dogmatic about how to prepare beans and includes many successful methods for preparing a pot of beans including the LA Times writer Russ Parsons' way of simmering a cup of beans (with six cups of water) in a French oven and then putting the French oven inside the oven at 350 degrees for one to two hours. Nor is Sando dogmatic about rinsing beans saying that there is no definitive proof that rinsing them improves their digestibility. He does say that hard beans like runner Cannellini beans need to be soaked in order for them to cook properly. But most heirlooms don't require rinsing. To fully utilize this book, you should invest in a Staub or Le Creuset 5 1/2 quart French oven. Not only will you be able to cook beans more effectively; you can use the French ovens to cook all-in-one meals, which will save you time. Intelligently written with a healthy respect for heirloom beans, full of professional attractive photographs and easy-to-follow recipes, Heirloom Beans gives this much-shunned food the high esteem and attention it deserves.

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