



# SNAP BEANS

## Description

Snap, green, or string beans are the beans most frequently consumed in the United States. Although they are members of the legume family, the long, slender green, yellow, or purple pods of snap beans are harvested while the seeds are still immature, and both pod and seeds are eaten as a vegetable. "Snap" refers to the sound the fresh pod makes when broken into pieces.

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## Recipe

### SPICY PICKLED BEANS

2 quarts water  
1 Tbls salt  
1/2 pound green beans, trimmed  
1/2 pound wax beans, trimmed  
1 1/4 cup red wine vinegar  
1/2 cup sugar  
1/2 cup sherry vinegar or cider vinegar  
1/2 cup vodka  
2 Tbls mustard seeds  
1 Tbls black peppercorns  
2 tsp fennel seeds  
1 to 2 tsp crushed red pepper  
4 garlic cloves  
4 fresh dill sprigs  
2 bay leaves

Bring 2 quarts water and salt to a boil in a large saucepan. Add beans; cook 4 minutes or until crisp-tender. Drain; place in a large bowl. Combine red wine vinegar and remaining ingredients in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil; cook 1 minute or until sugar dissolves. Pour over beans; cover and marinate in refrigerator at least 24 hours. Discard dill and bay leaves. Drain, if desired. NOTE: Refrigerate beans in an airtight container for up to two weeks.

## Varieties

The "string" in "string beans" refers to a string-like fiber that, until the late 19th century, characterized all fresh beans and had to be removed before the beans were eaten. Today, modern hybrid varieties no longer have the "string" and are referred to as snap beans. Many varieties of green snap are grown throughout the United States. Variants include pods that are pale yellow, called wax beans. The term "French green bean" is sometimes used to refer to small, young green beans that are cooked and eaten whole (also called haricots or haricots vertes) or to mature green beans that have been cut into diagonal strips. Purple snap beans, available in limited supply, turn green when cooked. Romano beans, also called Scarlet Runner beans, are similar but flatter than snap beans.

## Nutrient Content

Yellow and green snap beans are a good source of vitamin C.

## Uses

Fresh snap beans can be steamed or simmered until the pods are tender. Steaming is the preferred method of cooking because it preserves nutrients. Chopped into 1 or 2 inch sections, snap beans can be tossed in salads, stir-fried, included in soups and stews, or served as a side dish.

## Availability

Snap beans are available year-round. The peak season in North America spans from May to October. They can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 5 days. The beans also are available frozen and canned, both whole and pre-chopped.

## Origin

Snap beans, like kidney beans, white beans, pinto beans, and cranberry beans are members of the common bean species, all of which trace their origins to the Western Hemisphere. Although remains of common beans from Central American sites have been carbon dated to 7000B.C., the original subspecies have not been identified. Indigenous peoples of South and Central America and American Indians crossed the beans to create many subspecies and varieties. Common beans, including the snap bean, were brought to Europe by Columbus and other 15th and 16th-century explorers. Today, many varieties of snap beans are grown throughout the world. The growth habit of snap beans is used to divide them into two varieties: Bush beans and pole beans (which must be trained to a pole or trellis). Both are warm-weather vegetables that must be planted after the danger of frost has passed. The beans are harvested when they are rapidly growing, about 8 to 10 days after flowering. At this stage, the color is bright and the pod is fleshy with small, green seeds. Leaving the pods on the plants too long decreases plant yield and results in tough, dull-colored pods.