

Cold Busting Black Bean N Ham Soup

This is one of my original creations which evolved over the years, mainly because I never wrote it down. I've had several requests from the family to make this soup lately. So after making a huge pot yesterday while it snowed, and having 5 teens and 2 tweens here all day, I have finally documented the process- for all our sakes.

This soup is incredibly tasty and nutritious. The country ham pieces infuse the soup, sealing in the flavors of the garlic, onions, celery, and spices. It makes an over generous portion, which freezes well, and can be reheated later. Black Bean N Ham Soup can be served along side your favorite cornbread. The ham can be omitted for a vegetarian meal. This soup can also be served with cheddar cheese, sour cream, and corn chips for variation.

No matter how you serve it, Black Bean N Ham Soup is a COLD BUSTER, guaranteed to warm and comfort on a bitter cold winter's day!

Finely chop the following by hand or in a food processor:

- 2 stalks celery
- 2 large carrot sticks or 1 cup of mini carrots
- 1 sweet yellow onion
- 4 garlic cloves
- 1 red or green bell pepper

Pour $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil or vegetable oil into a large skillet. Add chopped veggies and sauté over medium heat 2-3 minutes. Set aside.

- 6 cans black beans, rinsed and drained and halved
- 2 cans chicken broth (about 8-10 cups)

In a blender or food processor, puree HALF of the black beans with 1 can of chicken broth. Transfer the puree to a large Dutch oven or soup pot. Add the remaining black beans and the other can of chicken broth. Then add the following canned items and stir to blend:

- 1 can petite diced tomatoes
- 1 can tomato sauce
- 1 can Rotel tomatoes (I used mild)



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Then add the following spices to the pot:

- 1 Tablespoon Oregano
- 1 Tablespoon Cumin
- 2 Tablespoons Chili Powder
- 2 Bay Leaves

Next add:

- 1 cup chopped country ham pieces

Then add the sautéed vegetables to the pot. Bring soup to a low boil over medium heat stirring frequently. Then reduce soup to a simmer for 30-40 minutes – stirring frequently.

Add 1-2 cups cooked white rice to the soup the last 5 minutes of simmering time. More chicken broth or water can be added if you prefer more liquid. The salt in the country ham pieces provided adequate flavor – but salt can be added to suit your on preference. Enjoy!