

Slow-Simmered White Bean Soup with Smoky Ham Hocks

, picked through and soaked for 3 hours (or overnight)



TIME
5-7 min

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INGREDIENTS

1 lb package navy beans, picked through and soaked for 3 hours (or overnight)

1 large smoked ham hock

1-2 tbsp oil (like olive oil or vegetable oil)

1 large onion, chopped

2-3 celery stalks, chopped

4-5 cloves garlic, minced

6-8 cups chicken or vegetable broth (or water, but broth adds more flavor)

1-2 bay leaves

1 teaspoon dried thyme

Salt and black pepper, to taste

A small amount of vinegar (about 1-2 tsp, like apple cider vinegar)

Crushed red pepper to taste (optional)

A pinch of sugar (optional)

Half a stick of butter (about 4 tablespoons)

Swaps and Notes:

Beans: Navy beans are traditional, but great northern beans or cannellini beans (white kidney beans) can be substituted. Soaking helps reduce cooking time and improve digestibility.

Ham Hock: A smoked ham hock is crucial for the authentic smoky flavor. Smoked turkey legs or a smoked ham bone can be used as alternatives, but ham hock offers the deepest flavor.

Broth: Chicken or vegetable broth adds more flavor

than just water. Adjust salt content, especially if using a salty broth or ham hock.

Aromatics: Onion, celery, and garlic form the foundational flavor base.

Seasonings: Dried thyme and bay leaves are classic for bean soups. The small amount of vinegar at the end is a chef's trick to brighten the flavors, and a pinch of sugar can balance the acidity. Crushed red pepper is optional for heat.

Butter: The addition of half a stick of butter adds a wonderful richness and silky mouthfeel to the soup.

DIRECTIONS

1. **Creating this hearty :** White Beans & Ham Hock Soup is a straightforward process of sautéing, combining, and slow simmering.
2. **Prepare the :** Beans: Pick through the 1 lb package of navy beans to remove any debris or stones. Rinse them thoroughly in cold water. Place the beans in a large bowl and cover them with plenty of cold water. Let them soak for at least 3 hours (or overnight, if preferred). After soaking, drain and rinse the beans again thoroughly before using.
3. **Sauté Vegetables:** In a large soup pot or Dutch oven (at least 6-8 quart capacity), heat a bit of oil (about 1-2 tablespoons) over medium heat. Add the chopped onions and chopped celery. Sauté for about 5-7 minutes until the vegetables begin to soften and become translucent. Add the minced garlic and cook for an additional 1 minute until fragrant, being careful not to burn it.
4. **Add :** Ham Hock and Beans: Place the smoked ham hock directly into the pot with the sautéed vegetables. Pour in the drained and rinsed navy beans.
5. **Pour in :** Broth and Seasonings: Pour in the chicken or vegetable broth (enough to cover the beans and ham hock, usually 6-8 cups). Add the bay leaves and dried thyme. At this point, season with a good amount of salt and pepper to taste, remembering the ham hock will add saltiness. Also, stir in a small amount of vinegar (1-2 tsp), the crushed red pepper (if using), a pinch of sugar (if using), and the half stick of butter. Stir everything to combine.
6. **Simmer:** Bring the soup to a boil over high heat. Once boiling, immediately reduce the heat to low. Cover the

pot with a lid and let it simmer gently for about 2.5 to 3 hours, or until the beans are incredibly tender and creamy, and the meat on the ham hock is falling off the bone. Stir the soup occasionally during simmering to prevent sticking and ensure even cooking.

7. **Remove : Ham Hock:** Carefully remove the ham hock from the pot. It will be very hot and tender. Allow it to cool slightly on a plate. Once it's cool enough to handle, shred all the meat from the bone, discarding any skin, fat, or gristle. Return the shredded ham meat to the pot with the beans. Discard the bay leaves.
8. **Adjust : Seasonings:** Taste the soup and adjust the seasonings as needed, adding more salt, pepper, or a final splash of vinegar if desired to brighten the flavor.
9. **Serve:** Ladle the hot White Beans & Ham Hock Soup into bowls and serve immediately.

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