

EACH RECIPE MAKES 4 TO 5 CUPS;
SERVES 8 TO 10

FIRM-COOKED BLACK BEANS



1 pound dried black beans, picked through and washed
1 small onion, cut in half
2 ribs celery, cut into 2-inch pieces
2 carrots, cut into 2-inch pieces
½ green bell pepper, cored and seeded
3 cloves garlic, peeled
1 bouquet garni of 1 bay leaf, 3 sprigs fresh thyme or ½ teaspoon dried, and 3 sprigs fresh parsley tied in a piece of cheesecloth
½ teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon dried oregano
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1. In a large heavy pot, soak the beans in cold water to cover by at least 3 inches for no less than 4 hours, or overnight. (If omitting this step, add approximately 1 hour to the cooking time.)

2. Add the vegetables, garlic, bouquet garni, cumin, and oregano to the pot of beans and soaking water. Bring to a boil over high heat. Skim off any foam that rises to the surface.

3. Reduce the heat and gently simmer the beans, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until tender, 1 to 1½ hours. Add water as necessary to keep the beans submerged.

4. Season the beans with salt and pepper during the last 10 minutes of cooking. Drain the beans in a colander and rinse with cold water. Remove and discard the vegetables and bouquet garni. The beans are now ready for adding to salads or salsas.

Store, covered, in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. The beans can also be reheated in a skillet or saucepan.

