

BRAZILIAN-STYLE BLACK BEANS

2 cups dried black beans, picked
2 bay leaves
water
1/2 T vegetable oil
2 very thick slices of bacon, diced
1 yellow onion, diced
1 clove garlic, minced
1/2 t ground cumin
salt
red pepper flakes
ground black pepper
fresh cilantro (optional)



Place the beans in a bowl and cover them with two inches of water. Allow them to soak overnight (I normally do that early in the morning and cook the beans in the evening). Drain, discarding the water. Place the soaked beans in a pressure cooker, add cold water to cover by 1 inch, add the bay leaves, and bring it to a boil. Cook under pressure for 15 minutes, then release the pressure. Alternatively, you can cook them in a normal pan, but it will take 1 to 2 hours. Cook until the beans become tender (they can be prepared up to this point and then kept in the fridge overnight).

Heat the oil in a small frying pan. Sauté the bacon pieces until they are golden, add the onion and sauté more, until dark golden. You do want some color here. When the onion is getting dark, add the garlic and cumin and sauté for a couple of minutes. Season lightly with salt and pepper, add red pepper flakes.

If you made the beans the day before, heat them until boiling, then add the bacon/onion mixture plus all the oil accumulated in the pan. Mix it all well and allow the beans to simmer for a while (10 to 30 minutes), uncovered. Remove some of the beans into a small bowl and smash the grains with a fork, forming a paste. Return the paste to the simmering pan and cook everything for 5 or 10 more minutes. Add salt to your taste; add more pepper and cilantro if you desire. Remove the bay leaves. Serve over white rice with the meat of your choice.

