USDA Assistant Secretary Westhill | Aba's Frijoles Negros Cubanos Auténticos con Pollo



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Authentic Cuban Black Beans with Shredded Chicken

A family recipe handed down by Clara, the mother of a dear friend and known affectionately as “Aba” by her grandchildren. Silky and slow-cooked Cuban black beans finished with tender shredded chicken and served over fluffy white rice. The recipe offers two paths: a traditional overnight-soaked version that builds the deepest flavor, and a quick version using canned beans for weeknights.

Makes: 4 servings



Ingredients

Traditional Method

- 12 ounces dried black beans
- 8 cups water, divided
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- ½ cup green bell pepper, diced
- ½ cup yellow onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon salt (or more to taste)
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 cups cooked chicken, shredded (about 10 ounces rotisserie, leftover, or freshly poached)

Quick method

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- ½ cup green bell pepper, diced
- ½ cup yellow onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cans Cuban black beans, undrained (15 ounces each)
- 1 cup water
- 2 tablespoons white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano

- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 cups cooked chicken, shredded (about 10 ounces)

To Serve

- Fluffy white rice

Directions

Traditional Method

1. Soak the dried beans in 3 cups of water in a covered pot overnight. Reserve the remaining 5 cups for the next day.
2. The next day, drain the beans and add the reserved 5 cups of fresh water to the pot. Bring to a boil and cook for 60 minutes, stirring frequently.
3. Watch the pot so the beans do not dry out. Add up to 1 cup of additional water if they absorb the liquid too quickly. Check softness by pressing a few beans against the side of the pot with the back of a spoon.
4. Once the beans soften, transfer them to a bowl along with 1 cup of the cooking liquid. Set aside.
5. Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Sauté the green pepper, onion, and garlic for 5 minutes until softened.
6. Add the softened beans with their reserved cooking liquid, the white vinegar, sugar, oregano, cumin, salt, pepper, and bay leaf. Stir to combine and bring to a boil.
7. Cover the saucepan, reduce the heat to low, and cook for 20 minutes until the beans reach a thick, creamy, silky consistency.
8. Stir in the shredded chicken and warm through for 2-3 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Serve over fluffy white rice.

Quick Method

1. Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Sauté the green pepper, onion, and garlic for 5 minutes until softened.
2. Add the canned beans with their liquid (do not drain), the water, white vinegar, sugar, oregano, cumin, salt, pepper, and bay leaf. Stir to combine and bring to a boil.
3. Cover the saucepan, reduce the heat to low, and cook for 20 minutes until the beans reach a thick, creamy, silky consistency.

4. Stir in the shredded chicken and warm through for 2-3 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Serve over fluffy white rice.

Notes

- Cooked black beans keep for 4-5 days in the fridge in an airtight container. Do not leave them at room temperature for longer than 1-2 hours after cooking. They also freeze well for up to 4 months.
- Any cooked chicken works here. A store-bought rotisserie bird yields 3-4 cups of shredded meat, which is enough for this recipe plus extra for lunches. Leftover roast or grilled chicken works just as well.

Recipe from: Devon Westhill, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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