

TREEBEARDS' RED BEANS

If one dish is synonymous with Treebeards, it's our red beans and rice. The secret to making a great pot of red beans is to avoid stirring them as much as possible. The beans will get very soft as they cook, and stirring them will eventually turn them into mush. If you like your beans thicker, remove the cover during the last 30 minutes of cooking or, when the beans have cooked, remove 1/2 cup of beans, mash, return to the pot and gently stir to mix.

- 1 pound dried light red kidney beans
- 2 quarts water
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 1/2 large bell pepper, chopped

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Treebeards' Red Beans - continued

2 1/2 teaspoons salt
1 1/2 rounded teaspoons thyme
1 1/2 rounded teaspoons oregano
1 1/4 teaspoons garlic powder
3/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
2 bay leaves
1 pound smoked sausage, cut into 1/2-inch slices
shredded Cheddar cheese
chopped green onions (including tops)

Wash beans under cold, running water. Place in heavy 5-quart pot. Cover with 2 quarts of water. Let beans soak overnight. *Or*, cover beans with 2 quarts of water, bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and boil 2 minutes. Turn off heat and let sit 1 hour before continuing. Do not drain off water.

Two hours before serving, add chopped onions, celery and bell pepper to beans. With spoon, gently push vegetable below water line. Cover pot and bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 1 1/2 hours.

In small bowl, mix all spices except bay leaves. Sprinkle on top of beans. Add bay leaves. Add sausage to pot and very gently stir spices and sausage into the beans; do not stir more than necessary. Cover and let simmer at least 30 minutes or until beans are completely soft.

Serve over hot rice with shredded Cheddar cheese and plenty of chopped green onions, if desired.

Serves 6.