

Vince Pitelka's Fabulous Top-Secret Extra-Special Spicy Cheesy Black Bean Dip

Version 2016.3

The following makes approximately one quart of bean dip.

- Empty two cans of black beans, including the liquid, into a large sauce pan (don't toss the liquid – it contains a good part of the flavor). If possible use a heavy enameled cast iron pan or a commercial-quality stainless steel pan with thick aluminum cladding on the bottom. Simmer on low heat to evaporate water and thicken the mixture, stirring frequently to keep it from burning at the bottom. It will burn very easily, so **MAKE SURE** you stir it frequently.
- Peel and finely chop one large or two small cloves of garlic, and add to the beans.
- Peel and dice one medium yellow or white onion and sauté slowly in a little olive oil until golden brown. Set aside to cool in a bowl.
- Remove seeds from one red, yellow, or green bell pepper (or, for a larger quantity of dip, include some of each), dice, and sauté (separate from onions) in a little olive oil until softened. Add to bowl with sautéed onions and set aside to cool.
- Once the bean mixture has reduced approximately 25% in volume, mash with a potato masher. Don't overdo it - leave some texture. Don't mash later in the process - you want the texture of the other materials to remain intact.
- Add the juice of one lime, ¼ teaspoon of lime zest (grated from outside of peel), one cube of chicken stock (chicken bouillon), ½ teaspoon of black pepper, ¼ teaspoon of red pepper flakes, ½ teaspoon of oregano, 1 teaspoon of cumin. Stir well. For a vegetarian version, leave out the chicken stock and add sea salt to taste.
- Add 4 to 6 ounces of extra-sharp cheddar cheese, cut into cubes (amount depends on how cheesy you want your dip to be. I usually add about 4 ounces). Stir, allow it to melt, stir again to blend well.
- Taste for spiciness. Add more cumin or red and black pepper if desired. The cube of chicken stock usually provides enough salt, but add more if you wish.
- Turn off the burner under the beans and remove from heat.
- Stir the cooled, sautéed onions and peppers into the beans and let sit for five minutes. This lowers the temperature of the mixture so that it does not cook the green onions and cilantro.
- Finely chop ½ bunch of green onions and stir into the beans.
- Dice ½ bunch of cilantro and stir into the beans.

You can serve this dip as soon as it cools a bit more. It's just as good (or better) a day or two later, and therefore can be made in advance. Just preheat on the stove (slowly to avoid burning) or in the microwave. It freezes very well, but should be used within several months.

For an extra-special dip presentation, finish the above recipe without adding the cheese, spread in a wide baking dish, cover with a layer of grated extra-sharp cheddar, and heat in oven or microwave until the cheese has melted. After it cools a bit, add a layer of guacamole and a thin layer of sour cream. Sprinkle with ground black pepper and garnish with finely chopped green onions and cilantro. Serve immediately.