

Smoky Vegetarian Bean Soup

Smoked paprika lifts this soup out of the ordinary, just as it did with the [roasted garlic-eggplant dip](#) I made a few months ago. But the real secret is in the mix of little beans. Use Trader Joe's 17 Bean & Barley Mix if you can find it, or use 1 pound of small, mixed beans if you can't. Be sure to soak them overnight for faster cooking and best results. This recipe is my adaptation of the recipe on the back of the TJ's bag.

16 ounces small, mixed, dried beans
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 cup *each* diced onion, celery, and carrot (or 1 container Trader Joe's Mirepoix)
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
5-1/4 cups vegetable broth
2-1/2 cups cold water
1 bay leaf
1/2 teaspoon Italian seasoning

Soak the beans in cold water to cover in a large pot overnight. Rinse, drain, and rinse again. Let them hang out for a minute in the colander.

Wipe out the pot, add the oil, and heat it over a medium-low flame. Add the onion, celery, carrots, garlic, and smoked paprika and saute, stirring frequently, for a few minutes or until vegetables are softened and fragrant, but not browned.

Add the beans back to the same pot along with the vegetable broth, water, bay leaf, and Italian seasoning. Bring to a boil, then lower heat and simmer, covered, for about an hour. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

The soup is even better after a day or two, but it's wonderful immediately as well.