**Mara's Multi-Bean Chili**

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The most important thing as you approach this recipe is that it can morph completely to what you have in your kitchen! This recipe was born because I always have a lot of varieties of beans around and this is a great catch-all for small amounts of assorted beans. Also, great for assorted peppers you have kicking around or even veggies like corn. Add spices to your taste--nearly every ingredient in this recipe is optional! If you don't have dry beans, try several types of canned beans (4-5 cans); just rinse and drain them before adding to the pot.

INGREDIENTS

3 cups assorted dry beans, 1/2 cup each of:

\* little black beans

\* big black beans

\* little red beans

\* big red beans

\* pinto beans

\* Jacob's cattle beans

1/2 red bell pepper, chopped

1 large onion, chopped

3 cloves garlic, minced

2 jalapeño peppers, chopped (remove seeds and veins for mild)

1 pound ground beef or bison (optional)

1/2 c. corn kernels (fresh or frozen)

1 bottle dark beer (optional)

1 T. red chile powder

1 tsp. ground cumin

1/2 tsp. garlic powder

1/2 tsp. onion powder

1/2 tsp. smoked paprika

1 14 oz. can diced tomatoes

Salt and pepper to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Sort, rinse and soak beans for a minimum of 4 hours. Drain.

2. Add beans to a 4-quart pot, cover with water and bring to the boil. Simmer covered for 1 hour, stirring occasionally.

3. Add some oil to a heavy bottomed dutch oven or stock pot over medium high heat.

4. Add meat if using and brown. Add onions, garlic and all peppers to the pot. Sauté until fragrant and vegetables start to soften.

5. Add all of the spices to the pot. Stir to coat meat and vegetables with spices.

6. Add canned tomatoes, stir to mix.

7. Add beer if using. Stir carefully, as it will foam.

8. Add the semi-cooked beans and their cooking liquid into the seasoned meat and vegetables. If using canned beans, add at this time as well (rinse and drain before adding).

9. Bring to the boil, then simmer for up to an hour to meld flavors and finish cooking the beans.

10. If using corn, add near the end.

11. Season to taste.

12. Serve with cornbread, tortilla chips, and your choice of toppings! Favorites include: cilantro, fresh onions, cheese, red pepper flakes, etc.