

John's Bean Soup

2 pounds dry mixed soup beans (get rid of the little "ham" flavor packets that are usually packed with dry beans)
8 cups (2 quarts chicken stock) not chicken broth
4 ham hocks if you aren't using a ham bone (even if I use a ham bone I use a couple ham hocks since they have a nice smoky flavor)
2 cups chopped carrots
2 cups chopped celery
2 1/2 cups chopped onion
6 cloves minced garlic
3 teaspoon mustard powder
6 bay leaves
2 tablespoons salt
3 teaspoon ground white pepper (or more to taste if you like a little spicier) Don't use black pepper it is not the same as white pepper

Rinse the beans, sorting out any broken or discolored ones. In a large pot cover the beans with water plus 3 inches over them. Cover pot and allow beans to soak over night.

After an overnight soak, drain the water from beans, add the ham hocks, bay leaves, 2 quarts of chicken stock then enough water to cover all by a couple inches.

Bring to a boil over high heat then reduce heat to simmer and simmer for one hour, then add mustard powder, ground white pepper, salt, carrots, celery, onion and garlic to the pot. Stir well, cover and bring to a boil, reduce heat to low and simmer for at least an hour, I usually cook for a couple hours. If need be add water or stock during cooking to keep the beans covered in liquid.

Remove ham bone and attached meat and allow to cool a bit so you can remove meat from bone and dice. Dice/chop ham bone meat and add to soup and simmer uncovered for 30 more minutes or so. Remove the bay leaves (Make sure you find as many as you put in. They don't digest well).

Season with additional salt and ground white pepper to taste. Depending on how salty the ham hocks are you may need to add quite a bit of salt. The pepper will increase in heat as the beans cook and as they sit in the fridge over night. Remember you can always add more seasoning but you can't take it out, so take it slow.

The beans will thicken up as they sit but if the liquid is too thin for your liking you can scoop out some of the beans, put in a blender and puree and add back to the pot.