



The Birds and the Beans

KATHY HARRISON SHARES A QUINTESSENTIALLY AMERICAN SUMMER SIDE DISH RECIPE

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND. The weather was glorious. I was invited to dinner at my nephew/niece's home in Michiana. Her parents were visiting from North Carolina. It would be nice to see them. We'd all visit, walk the beach, then have a barbeque in the backyard.

"I'll bring baked beans," I said.

"Oh, my mom is going to make the beans," my niece said. "Hers are really good."

The gauntlet was thrown. My beans started with dried beans, soaked overnight, then simmered slowly with onion, bay leaves, and peppercorns before being added to a tangy sauce and baked for a couple of hours. What could she possibly make that could top that?

My brother- and sister-in-law picked me up for our drive. We got to Michiana in record time. After catching up for a while, we decided to walk to the beach...about a half hour walk, at the snail's pace we go. There were no beans simmering on the stove; no beans gently baking in the oven. I figured Gaye, my niece's mom, would be staying behind to cook. But no. She changed from sandals

to walking shoes and was out the door.

We were walking for several minutes before I realized something was different. The birds were chirping, but it was another song. I was not hearing the cardinals, robins, and blue jays. The birds that flitted in the trees on our path were red-winged blackbirds, sparrows, and purple finches. At the beach we saw loons and herons, each with its own call.

After lolling about on the sand, being hypnotized by the gentle rhythm of the waves, we finally decided we'd better get moving if we were going to get dinner started. We were suddenly hungry. On the way back, I resumed my obsession with the beans. The hamburgers and hot dogs would take no time. But the beans? When would we finally eat?

Back in the kitchen, Gaye started opening cans. Cans! Many. She emptied them into a pot, adding some sugar and something from a bottle. After simmering for a few minutes, the beans would get baked in the oven while we had cocktails on the porch. I turned away, partly horrified and partly smirking. I knew this concoction couldn't hold a candle to "my" beans.

Gaye's Baked Beans



INGREDIENTS:

- 1 (14 oz) can lima beans
- 1 (15 oz) can butter beans
- 1 (28 oz) can vegetarian baked beans
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup red wine vinegar
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- 2 tablespoons molasses
- ½ cup ketchup
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Drain the beans and set aside. Combine the remaining ingredients in a medium saucepan and simmer for 15 minutes. Add the beans and mix well.
2. Turn the beans into a 3-quart baking dish or casserole. Bake for 45-60 minutes until bubbling. (The beans can be assembled in advance and refrigerated. Bring to room temperature and bake when needed.) Serves 8 to 10.

I was wrong. As the sun was descending, the birds started their lullaby. This new melody was as soothing as the birdsong at home. The hamburgers were juicy, the potato salad creamy, and those beans that cooked so quickly? They were delicious. 🍴



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