



# Bean feasting

by Nichola Motley

*It's not that I don't like beans but somehow they just don't end up getting eaten.*

DO you have one of these? A cupboard in the corner of the kitchen full of sad looking dusty glass jars containing greying pellets. These jars once held the promise of a zingy new you. A leaner and fitter you, a you who'd be wearing strappy summer dresses or getting back into that pair of jeans which have been lurking in the bottom of your wardrobe for too long. If I squint at the labels on the jars they say aduki beans, lima beans, butter beans, split peas etc. It's a bean-graveyard as on the labels mostly they say the beans should have been chucked out years ago – along with the jeans! We all know how jolly healthy the little critters are (well just in case you don't they

provide low fat protein, have a low GI index and are full of minerals). On the occasions I have tried it – I have had varied success in cooking dry beans so now they come in tins, I have started a collection of them as well. It's not that I don't like beans but somehow they just don't end up getting eaten. Well for all of you whose bean experience matches mine you'll appreciate knowing about the truly easy way to eat beans. Easy Bean is a ready meal of the tastiest authentic pulse recipes from around the world. Made by hand in small batches from quality ingredients, each pot is a microwavable meal for one, the slogan for which is 'lunch on the go or supper in a mo.'

The creator of Easy Bean is Somerset based Christina Baskerville. She is a woman who is very well acquainted with the bean kingdom having worked in agricultural development with pulse farmers in the tropics, South and Central America and Africa. Pulses are a great crop to grow as they add nitrogen to the soil. Christina tells me about a bean which grows alongside maize; so it's space economical, climbing as it does the maize stems, while at the same time feeding its roots. Pulses also have a much lower carbon footprint than animal protein.

Christina is working with the Fair Trade Foundation and hopes Easy Bean will be one of the first companies to be using pulses with the Fair Trade mark. On the whole however, we in the UK are somewhat bean-ignorant. I am not alone! It was during her work abroad that Christina learned her bean cookery know-how. One of her most memorably tasty bean meals was while travelling through the desert in the Sudan. 'It was just a truck stop in the middle of nowhere. We ate a kind of butterbean cooked in a rich spicy tomato sauce, it was simple but well prepared and absolutely delicious.'

Weren't pulses once regarded as the preserve of the hairy hippy? Bean eating is certainly on the increase perhaps because we all seem to be tending



*Two of the Easy Bean meals have won Great Taste awards*

in the hippy direction – isn't it de rigueur to dabble in meditation and own a pair of Birkenstock look-alikes? But Christina is on a mission to 'raise the stakes of the humble pulse' which is feted in other parts of the world. In France beans are, of course, an essential ingredient of cassoulet and the Brazilian national dish, feijoda, contains black turtle beans. Christina aims to keep her dishes as authentic as possible and the sleeve tells you the background of the meal. Beans were, and still are, staple food for peasants in many parts of the world and are usually cooked in one pot over a fire. Often the meals take their name from the pot they are cooked in. Africa

palava is one such that Easy Bean produce. The recipe for this is brown beans with chicken, sweet potato, spinach in a peanut sauce. Another is Spanish puchero – butterbeans and chorizo sausage with red peppers and smoky pimenton, Mmmmm. Two of the Easy Bean meals have just won Great Taste awards. I can see why. All of the meals provide at least two portions of your '5 a day' and are a complete meal as they contain all the food groups.

So chuck out all the stale dry beans in your cupboard and seek out Easy Bean. There are lots of local stockists including Washingpool, Goose Slade and Littlemoors Farm Shop and Ceres Natural Foods.

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