

RANCHO GORDO presents

CHEF TAFFY ELROD'S NOSTALGIC BEAN KITCHEN



5 NEW BEAN DISHES
FOR COOKING IN
QUARANTINE AND BEYOND

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, while the pandemic raged and my husband—who is also my business partner—was stuck in Europe, I was forced to shutter our restaurant. I found myself all alone, cooking at home for the first time in years. Like so many others, one of the ways I comforted myself was by reviving old traditions in the kitchen. I longed for the simple foods that were on the stove everyday when I was growing up. I also spent a lot of time commiserating on social media, which is how I met Steve Sando, finally got to experience the wonder of Rancho Gordo beans, and came to share these recipes with you.

It may sound silly to talk about beans this way but honestly, these beans are breathtaking in their sweet, yielding, tenderness, and earthily voluptuous in their savory robustness. They are to grocery store dry beans as fresh pasta is to grocery store dry pasta, which is to say an entirely different animal. They are a pleasure to cook and a joy to eat. If you think of beans as a quotidian drudge, brace yourself and prepare to rethink everything you know about the world. If you already love beans, prepare yourself to be enraptured beyond what you imagined possible.

In the face of it all when I approached my Rancho Gordo beans, I wanted to remember, reconnect, and reinvent the comfort foods from my family. I like to believe I have slightly elevated the homey food of my youth, while staying true to its simple comforts. Things changed so much last year I still can't invite you to dine at our restaurant or at our table, but I can invite you to dine with me through these memories and recipes.

#1. AYOCOTE MORADO ANTIPASTO

Serves 4

The Ayocote Morado beans were a revelation, so firm that at first, I was a bit perplexed as to how to handle them. Then I realized that I wanted to approach them like fava beans, or garbanzos, and use their meaty texture against the punchy flavors of an antipasto dish. I make my own marinated mushrooms by sauteing fresh button mushrooms in olive oil with garlic, adding red pepper flakes, then tossing them in a vinaigrette while they are still warm. Feel free to add anything you like to this mix—it's more a suggestion than a recipe. Artichoke hearts, cherry tomatoes, fried eggplant, or zucchini would all make delicious additions.

1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1/4 cup red wine vinegar

1 teaspoon dried oregano

1 teaspoon fennel seeds, crushed

1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

1/4 teaspoon sea salt

Pinch of red pepper flakes

2 cups cooked Rancho Gordo Ayocote Morado beans, drained

1 cup "perline" size fresh mozzarella, drained

1 cup marinated mushrooms, drained

1 cup mixed olives, rinsed and drained

1 hot cherry pepper, split

Handful of fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped

Handful of fresh basil leaves, torn

1. In a large bowl or container with a lid, whisk together the olive oil, vinegar, oregano, fennel seeds, sea salt, black pepper, and red pepper flakes.
2. Add the beans, fresh mozzarella, mushrooms, olives, hot pepper, and parsley to the bowl and mix to combine with the vinaigrette.
3. Cover and marinate for at least one hour, preferably overnight. Stir or mix occasionally to redistribute the vinaigrette.
4. Garnish with torn basil leaves before serving.

#2. WARM FRENCH LENTIL SALAD WITH TUNA

Serves 2 to 4

Lentils make for a lovely winter salad; use any vegetables you have languishing in your crisper. Slice celery paper-thin, use a peeler to make carrot curls, or sauté greens. A good, canned tuna, like an Italian tuna packed in olive oil, elevates this homey dish.

3 tablespoons minced shallot
3 tablespoons sherry vinegar
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves, bruised
1 teaspoon fresh parsley or tarragon, minced, plus more for garnish
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 cup cooked Rancho Gordo French-style Green Lentils, warmed
4 cups prepared vegetables of your choosing such as celery, carrots, cucumbers, parsley, olives, radicchio, or endive
1 can Italian tuna in olive oil, drained and flaked

1. In a small jar with a lid, combine the minced shallot, vinegar, mustard, thyme, parsley, salt, and pepper. Cover and shake well, then add the olive oil, cover, and shake again.
2. Stir half of the prepared vinaigrette into the warm lentils. Dress the prepared vegetables with a couple tablespoons of the remaining vinaigrette.
3. Assemble the salad: place a layer of the dressed vegetables on serving plates, top with lentils, then flaked tuna; drizzle the remaining vinaigrette over the tuna and garnish with more parsley.

#3. BLACK CAVIAR LENTILS AND POTATOES WITH CRÈME FRAÎCHE

Serves 4 to 6

I couldn't resist this play on caviar and potatoes, even though that's not my usual style. A little whimsy is worth it in this case because the results are delightful. Black caviar lentils are spiked with crisp seaweed, and tumbled atop roasted new potatoes, then garnished with crème fraîche and fresh herbs. They are good served hot or cold. If you want to assemble them in advance, wait to add the seaweed sprinkle until immediately before serving so it stays crisp.

12 small red potatoes, about 2 inches each
1 tablespoon neutral oil
1 teaspoon sea salt, divided
½ cup uncooked Rancho Gordo Black Caviar Lentils
2-inch piece dashi kombu
1 tablespoon crisp wakame seaweed, such as wakame chazuke, plus more for garnish
½ cup crème fraîche or sour cream
Snipped fresh dill or chives

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Oil a baking sheet. Cut the potatoes in half lengthwise, and trim the rounded sides so they sit flat. Toss the potatoes in the oil and ½ teaspoon sea salt, then spread them out on the baking sheet. Bake until tender but still firm, about 30 minutes.
2. In a pot, combine the lentils with 2 cups water, the remaining ½ teaspoon salt, and the kombu. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce the heat and simmer until tender but still holding their shape, 20 to 25 minutes. Drain the lentils and mix in the tablespoon of wakame.
3. Arrange the roasted potatoes on a serving platter so the flat sides are facing up. Top each potato with a spoonful of lentils, a sprinkle of seaweed, a dollop of crème fraîche, and a sprinkle of dill or chives.

#4. YELLOW EYES WITH MILLET AND COLLARD GREENS

Serves 4

This simple preparation allows the yellow eyes to shine. The millet mirrors their golden color and mild flavor. Blanching the collard greens preserves their beautiful green color and retains texture to contrast with the mellow creaminess of the beans and millet. Beans and millet could be found on my Grandma June's stove almost every day. They are my true comfort foods.

½ pound (1 cup) uncooked Rancho Gordo Yellow Eye beans, sorted and rinsed
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, diced
1 large carrot, diced
1 large stalk celery, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
Pinch red pepper flakes
½ cup dry millet
Sea salt and black pepper
6 ounces collard greens, stems removed, cut into ribbons
1 tablespoon liquid aminos or soy sauce

1. Place the beans in a medium pot with enough water to cover by about 2 inches, then bring to a boil. Boil for 10 minutes, then reduce to a simmer and cook until the beans are becoming tender, about 40 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat; add the onion, carrot, and celery and sweat until the onions are translucent. Add the garlic and red pepper flakes and continue to cook until the garlic is soft and fragrant. Don't let the vegetables brown.
3. Add the cooked vegetables, the millet, salt, and pepper to the pot with the beans. Add enough warm water to cover by about 2 inches; stir well. Return to a simmer and cook until the millet is soft and the beans are tender.
4. While the millet is cooking, bring a pot of well-salted water to a boil. When the water is boiling, add the collard greens to the pot and boil, uncovered, until they are bright green and tender with a little bite to them, 5 to 6 minutes. When the greens are done, strain them and place them directly into ice water to cool.
5. When the beans are tender, stir the collard greens and liquid aminos into the pot. Taste for seasoning and adjust to taste.

#5. CRANBERRY BEANS, BALKAN STYLE

Serves 4

This is a common preparation for beans in many parts of the world of course, but fresh, high-quality paprika, smoked beef, and caramelized onions give these beans their Balkan panache. My husband taught me this recipe, which he learned from his mother in Montenegro, where they grew their cranberry beans near Lake Shkodra. The finished beans should be brothy and are best served with a crusty loaf of homemade bread, and a simple salad of feta, onions, and tomatoes dressed with olive oil and plenty of strong vinegar.

½ pound (1 cup) uncooked Rancho Gordo Cranberry beans, sorted and rinsed
1 bay leaf
4 ounces dried, smoked beef (suho meso), cut into ½-inch pieces
2 to 3 tablespoons olive oil
1 cup diced yellow onion
1 tablespoon sweet paprika
Salt and pepper to taste
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

1. Place the beans in a medium pot with the bay leaf and enough water to cover by about 2 inches, then bring to a boil. Boil for 10 minutes, then reduce to a simmer and cook until the beans are becoming tender, about 40 minutes. Add the smoked beef to the pot and continue to cook.
2. While the beans cook, heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until browned and caramelized. Stir in the paprika and cook for another minute or two.
3. Stir the onion-paprika mixture and the vinegar into the beans. Use a little water to deglaze the pan and add that to the beans, too. Add more water to the beans if needed.
4. Season the beans with salt and pepper and cook the beans until they are tender and the broth is beginning to thicken slightly.



CHEF TAFFY ELROD

Taffy Elrod is a professional chef, cooking instructor, recipe developer, food writer, and former restaurant owner, with over 20 years experience in the food industry. Born into a family of artists and cooks in Ann Arbor, Michigan, she learned early on that food was a powerful medium for creation and change. She now cooks and develops recipes in New York's Hudson Valley, where she lives with her husband Pizza Man and their rescue cat Kit-Kat.

Learn more about Chef Taffy Elrod at www.cheftaffyelrod.com and be sure to check out her newly launched series of virtual cooking classes at www.airsubs.com/pros/chef-taffy.

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