

Tuscan Shrimp and Beans

Shrimp and bright flavors transform cannellini beans from winter to all-weather fare.

≧ BY STEVE DUNN ≦

In Italy, Tuscans living in rural areas were once referred to as *mangiafagioli*, or “bean eaters,” a reference to their consumption of economical bean dishes. The most traditional preparation is an ultrasimple wintry one in which dried cannellini beans are simmered with herbs and garlic until tender and then drizzled with olive oil for serving. But recently I came across a dish making the rounds on cooking blogs that pairs cannellini with shrimp, a combination that adds up to a nice springtime stew. Most of the recipes go something like this: Warm several cups of cooked beans in olive oil with a little of their cooking liquid. Meanwhile, sear a pound of shrimp separately, sauté some onion and garlic, and stir in chopped tomatoes. Add the shrimp and some shredded fresh basil, and spoon the mixture over the warmed beans.

I loved the sweet-savory pop of flavor from the shrimp in these versions, but that flavor was confined to the shrimp themselves rather than integrated into the dish. I wanted to bolster that seafood flavor so it permeated the beans, too. I also wanted the dish to be fast, so I decided from the outset to use a couple of cans of cannellini beans rather than dried beans. Since it wasn't yet tomato season, I also determined that I would use canned tomatoes instead of the fresh ones that many recipes called for. For ease, and because they maintain their shape due to the addition of calcium chloride, I would use the diced kind.

My next decision was to borrow a trick from our Shrimp Scampi recipe (January/February 2016) and make a 10-minute concentrated stock from the shrimp shells, which are packed with the savory compounds we associate with shrimp flavor. This required nothing more than browning the shells in oil (which further boosts the flavor they contribute), simmering them in a little bit of water, and straining them before discarding them. I then warmed the beans in this shrimpy liquid for a few minutes.

This change helped make the dish seem more integrated, but I wanted still more complex seafood flavor. The fix was threefold. First, in the same pan I'd used to make the stock, I sautéed two minced anchovies along with other simple aromatics and seasonings; it's an ingredient we often turn to when we want to add deep savoriness to dishes both seafood and otherwise. Second, I added the shrimp stock back to the pan along with the canned tomatoes and then simmered the beans in this mixture for about 20 minutes, which not only concentrated the seafood flavor even more but also helped meld all the flavors. Third, instead of searing the shrimp

separately, I poached them—brined first to season them and help them stay juicy—in the bean mixture over low heat during the final few minutes of cooking. The shrimp flavored the beans, and the beans also insulated the shrimp from direct heat so that they stayed plump and moist.

I freshened up the stew's rich seafood flavor with a bit of lemon zest and juice and made one final tweak: adding the liquid from one can of beans, which contained just enough starchy body so that the stew's consistency was lightly thickened and almost creamy—ideal for eating from a spoon or scooping up with a piece of crusty bread.

Deeply flavorful and on the table in less than half an hour, this was the kind of quick dinner I could whip up on a weeknight and the kind I want to tuck into on a lazy Sunday. I was officially a mangiafagioli, too.

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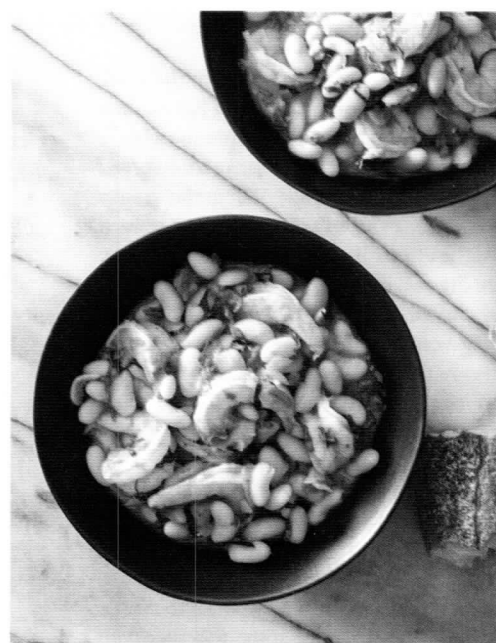
SERVES 4 TO 6

We prefer untreated shrimp, but if your shrimp are treated with added salt or preservatives like sodium tripolyphosphate, skip brining in step 1 and increase the salt to ½ teaspoon in step 3. Serve with crusty bread.

- 2 tablespoons sugar
- Salt and pepper
- 1 pound large shell-on shrimp (26 to 30 per pound), peeled, deveined, and tails removed, shells reserved
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled, halved lengthwise, and sliced thin
- 2 anchovy fillets, rinsed, patted dry, and minced
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 2 (15-ounce) cans cannellini beans (1 can drained and rinsed, 1 can left undrained)
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained
- ¼ cup shredded fresh basil
- ½ teaspoon grated lemon zest plus 1 tablespoon juice

1. Dissolve sugar and 1 tablespoon salt in 1 quart cold water in large container. Submerge shrimp in brine, cover, and refrigerate for 15 minutes. Remove shrimp from brine and pat dry with paper towels.

2. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add shrimp shells and cook, stirring frequently, until they begin to turn spotty brown and skillet starts to brown, 5 to



Poaching the shrimp in a concentrated stock together with the beans enhances the flavor of both.

6 minutes. Remove skillet from heat and carefully add 1 cup water. When bubbling subsides, return skillet to medium heat and simmer gently, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes. Strain mixture through colander set over large bowl. Discard shells and reserve liquid (you should have about ¼ cup). Wipe skillet clean with paper towels.

3. Heat 2 tablespoons oil, onion, garlic, anchovies, pepper flakes, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper in now-empty skillet over medium-low heat. Cook, stirring occasionally, until onion is softened, about 5 minutes. Add 1 can drained beans, 1 can beans and their liquid, tomatoes, and shrimp stock and bring to simmer. Simmer, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes.

4. Reduce heat to low, add shrimp, cover, and cook, stirring once during cooking, until shrimp are just opaque, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove skillet from heat and stir in basil and lemon zest and juice. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to serving dish, drizzle with remaining 1 tablespoon oil, and serve.

Look: It's Simple

A step-by-step video is available at CooksIllustrated.com/apr17

