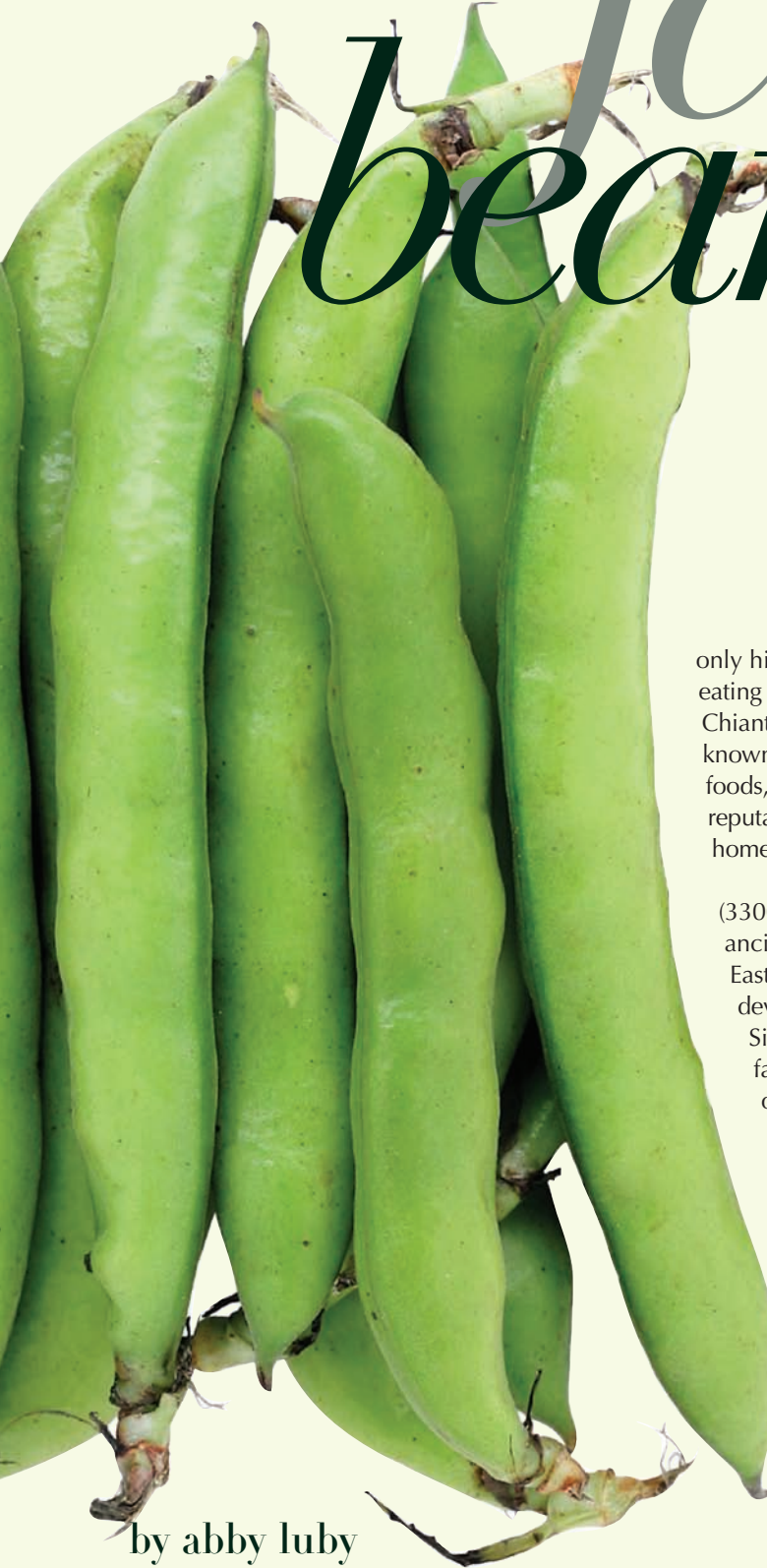


fava bean

a 2-season



HANNIBAL LECHTER

only hinted at the value and flavor of fava beans when he described eating a census taker's liver with "some fava beans and a nice Chianti" in the 1991 film *The Silence of the Lambs*. The fava (also known as broad bean or habas) is one of the world's oldest cultivated foods, and new insights about its usefulness are helping to bolster its reputation as a versatile, two-season vegetable that is as much at home in the Hudson Valley as it is in Egypt.

Cultivated by agri-based societies of the Bronze age (3300-1200 BC), fava beans were a staple for several millennia in ancient Egypt, China, India, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Given its longevity, it's not surprising that the bean has developed a lofty position in the myth and lore of many cultures. Sicilians credit the bean and Saint Joseph for saving them from famine when their crops failed. A meal of fava beans is served on Saint Joseph's Day (March 19) with a dish of uncooked beans to pocket for good luck. The bean is used in the practice of hoodoo rootwork, a folk-magic tradition in New Orleans, where seven "Mojo beans" or "African wishing beans," as they are known, are carried around for seven days and then tossed into running water over the left shoulder while making a wish.

That it has existed for so long in so many diverse locations and cultures is a credit to how easy this bean is to grow, especially in cooler climates. The plant does double duty as both a spring and fall vegetable: In the spring, virtually the whole plant—leaves, stalks, flowers and young beans—can be eaten; left in the pod to mature and dry, the beans can be harvested in the fall and are used whole or ground in soups, sauces and other, primarily ethnic, dishes.

by abby luby

At Windfall Farms in Montgomery, an organic vegetable farm, fava beans are thickly planted in three 800-foot-long beds, each seven feet wide. "We do a good trade with the young greens of the fava plant at the farmers' markets in New York City," says Hubert McCabe, a farmer who has a production partnership with Windfall Farms owner Morse Pitts. "People love the greens as well as the plant's edible flowers." Rather than waiting for the beans to dry on the vine, as is common practice, McCabe harvests the young beans. "We can't wait for the bean to mature—we rob the fava of its young beans," he says.

Near Goshen, Jeff and Adina Bialas started their small organic farm last April and included fava beans among their hundred crops. The young beans proved popular with customers. "We grew just a couple of rows and didn't have any extra for drying," Jeff says. "The fresh ones were what excited customers. We're planning to grow about the same amount this fall—we are going to grow more for the 2011 season."

Jack Algieri, farm manager at Stone Barns in Pocantico Hills, says he plants fava seeds just before spring. "We shovel the snow away around the first week in March and chisel the seeds right into the ground. It's a big bean and has a lot of energy to push forward—it's a good, easy crop for us." The bean is harvested as early as the first week in June, Algieri says, though for the first time, this year he intends to plant fava seeds in the fall. "We could very likely get a good crop by the end of October," he notes. "I've never had a bad crop of fava beans. We do like having them."

For home gardeners, the seeds are cheap, abundant and easy to find in the better seed catalogues. Like most legumes, they help conserve soil nitrogen and break disease and weed cycles. ("They don't suck out the essential energy of the soil, like tomatoes," Algieri notes.) As soon as the soil is workable, they can be planted about two inches apart in rows. Watch for aphids, Algieri warns.

On the health scale, the nutritious and inexpensive bean tops the scoreboard: It is especially high in minerals and nutrients, including fiber and iron; it is low in sodium, low in fat, contains no cholesterol and is rich in vitamin C. Less than a cup of favas supplies almost 300 calories and about 50 grams of carbohydrates. The entire fava plant—leaves, stems, pods and the very young, green beans—have been found to contain levo-dopa, a chemical used to treat Parkinson's Disease, and some evidence suggests it might be used to help control the disease's symptoms. (Three ounces of fresh green or canned fava beans can have about 50-100 milligrams of levo-dopa.) Still other studies suggest the bean is an alternative to Viagra. On the down side, some people with Middle Eastern heritage can develop serious anemia from eating fava beans—a genetic disorder known as Glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase deficiency (G6PD), or "favism."

Fresh fava beans are not rare on gourmet menus or in home kitchens. Many spring menus feature the fresh, newly grown, tender and nutty flavored fava beans either raw in salads or braised in pasta dishes. The leaves of the early plant can be eaten raw or cooked like spinach and can be found at farmers' markets and health food stores. It takes a bit of doing

Fava bean bisque

This soup can be thick as porridge or almost bisque-like

Ingredients

- 1 pound dried fava beans
 - 4 large garlic cloves, smashed
 - 1 tablespoon cumin seeds
 - 4 tablespoons paprika (Use the best paprika you can find; Pimenton—a Spanish smoked paprika—is best.)
As an alternative or in addition to paprika, use cayenne and/or *harissa** to taste)
 - 2 quarts water or chicken stock
 - 2 tablespoons salt (to finish)
 - ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- yield: 8 servings*

Method

1. Soak beans in cold water for several hours, drain, rinse.
2. Toast cumin seeds in a hot skillet until fragrant. Allow to cool, then grind in a coffee mill. (*If a grinder is not available, leave the seeds whole but see note in step 6.*)
3. Heat ¼ cup of the olive oil in a pot, sauté garlic until light brown and nutty smelling, add cumin, 2 tablespoons of the paprika, *harissa* or cayenne, mix well and heat the mixture further to combine flavors.
4. When fragrant, add the beans, then add water or chicken stock to cover.
5. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer slowly for 1 hour or until beans are very tender (add liquid as needed to keep beans submerged).
6. When beans are very tender, remove the liquid mixture from heat and purée in blender.) This soup can be made as thick as porridge or lighter, almost like a bisque—adjust the amount of liquid to suit your preference. *Note: If you did not grind the cumin seeds in a coffee mill in step 2, pour the puréed mixture through a strainer now to remove them.*
7. Adjust seasoning for salt and desired "heat" by adding cayenne or *harissa*.
8. Heat the remaining ¼ cup olive oil over low heat and add the remaining 2 tablespoons paprika. Stir well and heat. Allow the mixture to rest to infuse the flavors; stir again just before serving.

Ladle soup into a bowl and drizzle paprika oil on top.

***Harissa is a Middle Eastern condiment that can be found in ethnic food sections of better stores. It will impart a more complex flavor than cayenne alone.**

Chef Niels Nielsen
Fez, 71 Partition St., Saugerties

to get at the “double-hulled” bean—it must be shucked from the pod and then removed from its own white, waxy coating. Mature beans can be found in supermarkets and health food stores—they can be found fresh, dried, skinless, frozen and canned. “We’ve carried fresh and dried fava beans for at least 25 years,” says Bill Lessner, of Adams Fairacre Farms markets (a prepared mixed-bean salad with fava beans occasionally shows up in the deli sections). Joe’s Italian Marketplace in Fishkill stocks roasted fava beans and a roasted fava-and-dried chickpea snack. “It was a snack I ate as a kid,” says Marketplace co-owner Santa Byrnes. “We also grew up on a dish of dried fava beans, Swiss chard and prosciutto.”

Selecting dried fava beans is easy, says Meghan Fells, chef and co-owner of Artist’s Palate restaurant in Poughkeepsie. “You want them to be brown, smooth and shiny—that means they were kept and dried well.” Fells uses fava beans for a hummus-type dish, and in *maccu*, a

dried fava-and-fennel soup with polenta.

Fava beans are a staple in Egyptian cuisine, and Chef Nabil Ayoubé, of The Chef’s Table at the Red Hook Country Inn, prepares fava beans for *ful medames*, the traditional Egyptian breakfast. The dish of mashed beans with oil, garlic, lemon, salt and cumin is eaten with onions and bread. Rather than soaking and draining the beans before cooking, as is common, Ayoubé cooks favas over a very low flame at night; by the next morning the beans are ready to use. Niels Nielsen, chef at Fez, a Middle Eastern restaurant in Saugerties that opened last fall, prepares a soup using fava beans, cayenne and harissa, a Middle Eastern condiment.

That the “good luck” bean hails from the ancients says it is a “tried-and-true” food—it wouldn’t be on our plates today if it wasn’t highly nutritious and easy to grow. Favas have been around for four or five millennia; chances are they’re here to stay

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Maccu (Dried fava and fennel soup with polenta)

This soup comes from the Sicilian tradition of clearing out the pantry of dried legumes in expectation of a bountiful harvest. This is considered a “peasant dish”—it can be made with the addition of pasta or other legumes—almost any leftover provisions in the pantry may be added.

Ingredients

1 pound dried fava beans
 3 quarts water or vegetable stock
 2 white onions, diced
 3 tablespoons sliced garlic
 1 small fresh chili, diced
 3 heads of fennel, medium dice (including the fronds)
 2 bunches greens (spinach and chard work nicely)
 1 cup sun-dried tomatoes, diced
 1 tablespoon fennel seed
 olive oil
 salt and pepper
 croutons (made from day-old bread)
feeds about 6

Method

1. Soak the fava beans overnight (Or use a quick-soak method: Cover with 2 inches of water, bring to a boil for one minute and let stand for an hour, then drain).
2. If you are using unpeeled favas, peel them now.
3. Toast garlic and chili until golden in a pot. Add onions, fennel seed, fennel, tomato, fava beans and water.
4. Simmer until beans break apart and soup thickens.
5. Add greens and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper.

Serve soup with croutons and drizzle with olive oil. For a nice alternative to the croutons, use polenta that has been chilled, grilled and cut into cubes.

Chef Meghan Fells

Artist’s Palate, 307 Main St., Poughkeepsie

Ful medames (Traditional Egyptian breakfast main course)

Prepare the beans

Ingredients

1 pound dried fava beans
 1 tablespoon white rice, uncooked
 1 tablespoon red lentils, uncooked

Method

Thoroughly wash the fava beans

1. Place washed fava beans in a metal pot with a tight-fitting lid, and add water to 3 inches above the beans.
2. Add uncooked rice and red lentils.
3. Tightly cover and cook over very low heat 6 to 8 hours.

Salsa

Ingredients

½ cup medium chopped red onions
 ½ cup medium chopped tomato
 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro

1 tablespoon chopped fresh garlic
 ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
 2 tablespoons fresh-squeezed lemon juice

Method

1. Heat olive oil in a medium saucepan and sauté onions and garlic over medium heat until fragrant (about 3 minutes).
2. Stir in tomatoes and cilantro and continue to cook the mixture for another 2 minutes.

To serve

Add salsa and lemon juice to fava beans and serve. *Variations: Add tahini, hard boiled eggs or hot sauce.*

Chef Nabil Ayoubé

**The Chef’s Table, Red Hook Country Inn
 7460 South Broadway, Red Hook**