

Vegetarian Chili

Container 1: Aromatics

- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- 1 green bell pepper, diced

Container 2: Tomato Paste

- 2 tablespoons tomato paste

Container 3: The Spice Blend & Oil

- 2 1/2 teaspoons smoked paprika
- 1 1/4 teaspoons ground cumin
- 3/4 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1/4 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon unsweetened cocoa powder
- 3/4 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 15 ml avocado oil (mix with the spices)

Container 4: Tomatoes

- 400 ml can (28 oz) diced tomatoes (*with their juices*)

Container 5: The Beans & Moisture

- 400 ml can of kidney beans (drained)
- Half a 400 ml can of black beans (drained)
- Half a 400 ml of pinto beans (drained)
- 341 ml can corn kernels, drained
- 100 ml water
- 3/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar

Cooking Instructions

1. **Sauté the Aromatics:** Heat a small amount of oil in a large heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat. Dump in **Container 1** and sauté for about 5 minutes until softened.
2. **Caramelize the Tomato Paste:** Push the vegetables to the side of the pot to create a clear opening in the center. Add **Container 2** directly to the hot spot. Let it fry and darken to a deep brick-red color for 2 minutes, stirring it constantly.
3. **Bloom the Spices:** Pour **Container 3** (including the avocado oil) directly into the pot over the paste. Stir constantly for 30 to 45 seconds to toast the spices in the oil.
4. **Add Tomatoes:** Drop the heat and deglaze immediately by adding **Container 4**. Stir everything together, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom of the pot. Reduce the heat to low.
5. **Simmer:** Pour in **Container 5** (beans etc.), cover the pot, and let it simmer for 35 to 60 minutes to let the flavors marry and the chili thicken up.

Notes

- The measurements in this recipe are approximate. You can be off by up to 40% on most of the ingredients and the chili will still turn out great.
- Use yellow onions only. White onions are too sharp and papery, and red onions lose their color appeal and turn a muddy grey-purple when long-simmered.
- Smoked paprika is an essential ingredient. Do not substitute regular paprika. Smoked paprika brings the vital campfire baseline that defines the entire flavor profile.
- Use Unsalted Tomatoes: Essential for salt control. Different brands dump wildly different amounts of salt into their canned tomatoes, so using salted cans makes the final taste unpredictable.
- Do not use crushed tomatoes. The chili will taste like spaghetti sauce.
- Cans often hold more than the recipe asks for. If you have leftover tomato paste or beans, toss it into a Ziploc bag and freeze it flat. Next time you make a batch of chili you can break off what you need.

Spices

- Every spice in this blend has a specific job. Change the ratios, and the entire personality of the chili shifts.
- **Smoked Paprika (2.5 tsp) — The Baseline:** The structural foundation. It provides heavy volume, a deep red hue, and a fake-smoke campfire element without needing actual liquid smoke.
- **Ground Cumin (1.25 tsp) — The Earthy Bridge:** Brings the classic, savory "chili" note. At half the weight of the paprika, it provides a warm, earthy baseline that anchors the brighter notes without tasting like taco seasoning.
- **Ground Coriander (0.75 tsp) — The Citrusy High Note:** Adds a subtle, bright, citrus-like sweetness that cuts through the heavy tomato and bean starches, keeping the palate from getting fatigued.
- **Turmeric (0.25 tsp) — The Hidden Depth:** It adds a subtle, earthy bitterness that balances the sweetness of the tomatoes and onions.

- **Unsweetened Cocoa Powder (1 tsp) :** Acts as a savory bittering agent. It mimics the complexity of long-simmered moles, adding a dark, velvety background note that rounds out the acidity of the tomatoes.
- **Dried Oregano (0.75 tsp) — The Herbal Punch:** Contains robust, minty, and slightly peppery essential oils (thymol) that punch through rich, heavy fats and beans.
- **Cayenne Pepper (0.25 tsp) :** A mild heat source that hits the back of the throat without masking the underlying flavors.

In this recipe, the ratio sits at **1.6 parts cumin to 1 part coriander** (1.25 tsp cumin to 0.75 tsp coriander).

- **Why this ratio works:** Cumin is loud, heavy, and earthy—it dominates the room. Coriander is bright, floral, and subtle. If you flip the ratio and use more coriander than cumin, the chili will start tasting more like a Middle Eastern tagine or a citrusy marinade than a savory North American pot of chili. Keeping cumin as the heavier anchor with coriander acting as the high-note sidekick keeps the flavor profile properly balanced.

Bean Ratios

Using a single type of bean (like a pot of 100% kidney beans) results in a monotonous texture and one-note flavor profile. This recipe uses a **50% / 25% / 25% split** to engineer texture and starch release:

- **Kidney Beans (400 ml — The Anchor):** Large, sturdy, and visually striking. They hold their shape well through a long simmer and provide a classic, meaty bite.
- **Black Beans (200 ml — The Creamy Density):** Black beans have a softer, denser interior and thin skins. As they simmer, they break down slightly, releasing starches that naturally thicken the chili base into a rich, velvety gravy.
- **Pinto Beans (200 ml — The Earthy Softness):** Pintos bridge the gap. They are naturally creamy and mild, absorbing the spice blend faster and more thoroughly than the larger kidney beans.

Oil

The recipe calls for avocado oil, but peanut oil can be used instead if that is what you have on hand. It has a high smoke point and a neutral profile that won't interfere with the spices.

However, avoid other cooking oils like extra virgin olive oil or standard vegetable/canola oil if you can:

- Extra virgin olive oil has a relatively low smoke point and a distinct, heavy flavor that can scorch or clash with the spices during the high-heat paste-caramelization stage.
- Standard cheap vegetable or canola oils often carry a flat, industrial aftertaste when heated aggressively. Stick to avocado or peanut for the cleanest results.

Freezing

This chili freezes well. Instead of freezing it in rigid containers that take up awkward freezer space and take hours to thaw, ladle the cooled chili into a **large, heavy-duty freezer Ziploc bag**. Zip it almost all the way closed, press it flat on a baking sheet to push out all the air pockets, and seal it completely. Lay it flat in the freezer until solid. It freezes into a dense, space-saving "slab." When you want a quick lunch or dinner, you don't have to thaw the whole batch—you can just crack off the amount you need, toss it into the microwave oven, and melt/reheat it directly.