Prep Time: 45 minutes (plus 12–18 hours bean soaking)
Cook Time: 1 hour 15 minutes (stovetop simmer)
Canning Time: 75 minutes (quarts) / 65 minutes (pints) at 10 lbs pressure
Total Time: Approximately 15–21 hours (including soak)
Difficulty: Intermediate
Method: Pressure Canning (Required for Safety)

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## Why This Recipe Works

Store-bought baked beans are convenient, but they can't compete with a jar of homemade beans you put up yourself. This recipe delivers that deep, molasses-rich, smoky-sweet flavor with tender beans that hold their shape, and it's shelf-stable for a year or more. The secrets: a proper overnight soak, a blend of molasses and brown sugar, real smoked bacon or salt pork, and a slow simmer before canning so the flavors marry.

Important: Because this recipe contains dry beans and meat (bacon/salt pork), it must be processed in a pressure canner. A water bath canner is not safe for this recipe. Follow the

processing times and pressures below exactly.

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Ingredients

For the Beans:

- 6 cups dried navy beans (or great northern beans), rinsed and sorted
- 12 cups water (for soaking)
- 8 cups fresh water (for cooking)
- 1 lb thick-cut smoked bacon or salt pork, diced
- 2 large yellow onions, diced (about 2 cups)
- 1½ cups molasses (mild or full-flavored, your preference)
- 1½ cups packed dark brown sugar
- 2 tbsp dry mustard powder
- 1 tbsp smoked paprika
- 2 tsp salt (plus more to taste)
- 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce (optional)
- 2 cups reserved bean cooking liquid (plus more as needed)

For the Jars:

- Boiling water or additional bean cooking liquid, as needed
- 7 quart jars or 14 pint jars, lids, and bands, sterilized

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Equipment

- Large stockpot or Dutch oven (at least 8 quarts)
- Pressure canner with rack
- Jar lifter, funnel, lid wand
- Clean kitchen towels
- Slotted spoon

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Instructions

Step 1: Soak the Beans (12–18 hours, inactive)

The night before you plan to can, rinse the dried beans in a colander and pick out any stones or shriveled beans. Place them in a large stockpot and cover with 12 cups of cold water—they'll expand to roughly triple their volume, so use a big pot. Let them soak at room temperature for 12 to 18 hours (overnight is perfect). This step is not optional: soaking softens the beans and reduces the gas-producing compounds.

Step 2: Precook the Beans (45–60 minutes, medium heat)

Drain and rinse the soaked beans. Return them to the pot, add 8 cups fresh water, and bring

to a boil over high heat (about 8–9 out of 10) . Reduce the heat to medium (about 5 out of 10) and simmer until the beans are tender but still hold their shape—about 45 to 60 minutes. Stir occasionally and skim off any foam that rises. Do not overcook: the beans will soften further during canning. Drain, reserving 2 cups (or more) of the cooking liquid.

Step 3: Cook the Bacon and Onions (10–12 minutes, medium-high heat)

In a large Dutch oven or heavy pot, cook the diced bacon or salt pork over medium-high heat (about 7 out of 10) until the fat renders and the meat is lightly browned, about 6 to 8 minutes. Add the diced onions and cook, stirring, until softened and translucent, about 4 to 5 minutes more. Do not drain the fat—it carries flavor.

Step 4: Build the Sauce (5 minutes, medium heat)

Reduce the heat to medium (about 5 out of 10) . Stir in the molasses, brown sugar, dry mustard, smoked paprika, salt, pepper, vinegar, and Worcestershire sauce. Stir constantly for 2 to 3 minutes until the sugar dissolves and the mixture smells rich and caramelized. Add 2 cups of the reserved bean cooking liquid and stir to combine into a thick, glossy sauce.

Step 5: Combine and Simmer (30 minutes, low heat)

Add the drained, precooked beans to the sauce pot and stir gently to coat every bean. Bring the mixture to a gentle simmer over low heat (about 3 out of 10) and cook, uncovered, for 30 minutes, stirring every few minutes to prevent scorching. The sauce should thicken and cling to the beans. If it becomes too thick, add reserved bean liquid a quarter-cup at a time—the mixture should be saucy, not dry, because the beans absorb liquid during canning. Taste and adjust salt.

Step 6: Fill the Jars (15 minutes, hot pack)

While the beans simmer, fill your pressure canner with 2–3 inches of water and bring it to a simmer, and warm the jars in a 200°F oven or a pot of hot water. Using a slotted spoon and funnel, ladle the hot beans into hot jars, filling to 1 inch from the rim. Then ladle in hot sauce and/or boiling water to cover the beans, maintaining that 1-inch headspace. Run a plastic knife or bubble tool around the inside of each jar to release air pockets, then recheck headspace. Wipe rims with a damp cloth, apply lids and bands (finger-tight), and load the jars into the canner rack.

Step 7: Pressure Can (75 minutes for quarts / 65 minutes for pints, 10 lbs pressure)

Lock the canner lid and bring it to a steady boil. Vent steam for 10 minutes before closing the petcock or weighted gauge. Bring the canner to 10 pounds of pressure (adjust for altitude: 15 lbs above 1,000 ft). Process quarts for 75 minutes or pints for 65 minutes, adjusting the heat to maintain steady pressure. Never lower the pressure or open the canner during processing. When time is up, turn off the heat and let the canner depressurize naturally—this takes 30 to 45 minutes. Do not force-cool it.

Step 8: Cool and Check Seals (12–24 hours, inactive)

Carefully open the canner and remove jars with a jar lifter, placing them on a towel-lined counter 1 inch apart. Let them cool undisturbed for 12 to 24 hours. Press the center of each lid: it should be concave and not flex. Remove bands, wipe jars, label with the date, and store in a cool, dark place.

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Time and Intensity Summary

| **Stage** | **Time** | **Heat Intensity** |
|---|---|---|
| Bean soak | 12–18 hours | None (room temp) |
| Bean precook | 45–60 min | High to Medium (8→5) |
| Bacon & onions | 10–12 min | Medium-High (7) |
| Sauce build | 5 min | Medium (5) |
| Bean simmer | 30 min | Low (3) |
| Jar filling | 15 min | Hot pack |
| Pressure canning | 75 min quarts / 65 min pints | 10 lbs pressure |
| Cooling & sealing | 12–24 hours | None |

Lasting time (shelf life): Properly sealed jars stored in a cool, dark place (50–70°F) keep for 12 to 18 months; for best quality, use within 1 year. Once opened, refrigerate and consume within 5–7 days.

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Nutrition Information (per ½-cup serving, approximately)**

*Values are estimates and will vary with portion size, bacon brand, and sauce thickness.*

- Calories: ~160
- Total Fat: 3.5 g (1.5 g saturated)
- Cholesterol: 5 mg
- Sodium: 320 mg
- Total Carbohydrates: 28 g
- Dietary Fiber: 6 g
- Sugars: 12 g
- Protein: 6 g
- Potassium: ~350 mg
- Calcium: ~50 mg
- Iron: ~1.5 mg