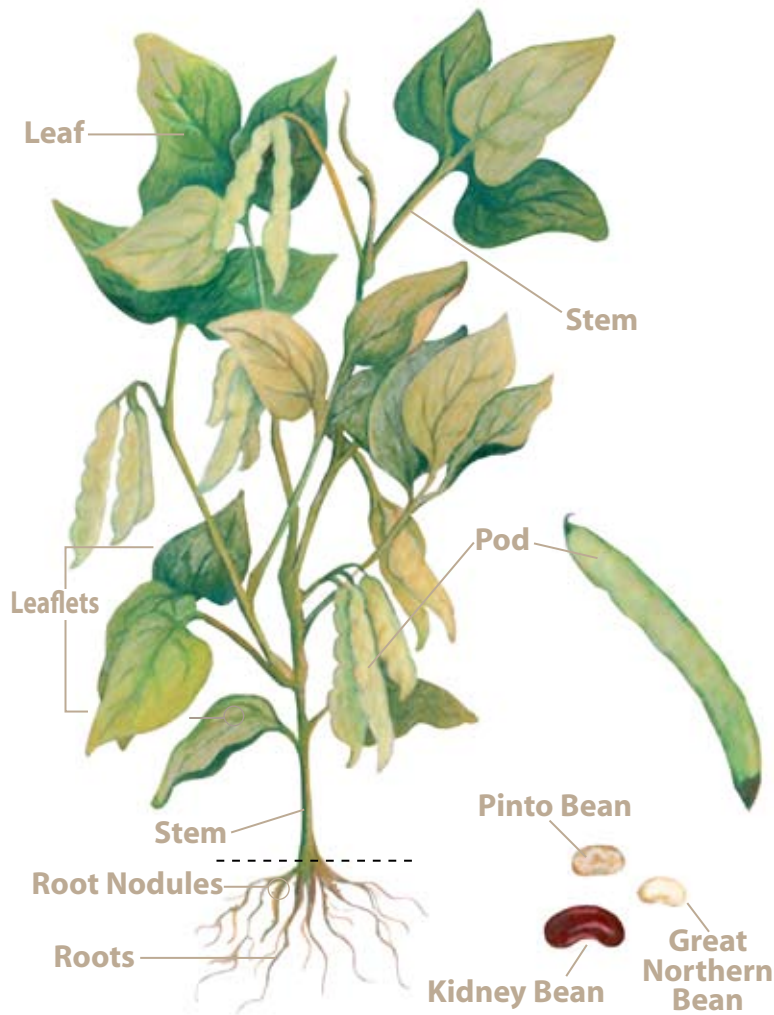




DRY EDIBLE BEANS

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Dry edible beans were discovered by Christopher Columbus in Cuba during the Sixteenth Century. He took them back to Europe, where they were considered to be a special delicacy. Today we use them because they are an excellent source of protein, fiber and energy. The dry edible bean plant is a legume that has the ability to use soil bacteria to pull nitrogen from the air and use it for its growth. This is important for growing crops and maintaining soil quality.

Planting

Great Northern, pinto and light red kidney beans are planted in late May to mid-June. These varieties are drought-tolerant, meaning they can survive on limited rainfall. Bright, sunny days help develop bean color that is visually more appealing to consumers.

A machine called a planter is used to place the seeds into the soil. The seeds are pushed into the ground about an inch-and-a-half to two inches deep depending on the moisture in the soil.

Harvest

It takes 80 to 90 days for the bean plants to mature. Harvest begins in early September when the plants are dry and the leaves start to fall off of the plants. The bean stems are cut just below the soil surface with a special attachment called a knife and placed into piles called windrows. The best time to cut the bean stem is before dawn, when there is dew on the plants. This prevents the pods from breaking open and spilling the beans on the ground. After four to five days or when the windrows have dried thoroughly, the bean plants are picked up with a machine called a combine and the beans are removed from the pods.

Dry edible bean producers make adjustments to their combines to protect the beans from being damaged. Damaged, split or broken beans are not acceptable to canners or packagers.

Processing

Beans are brought to a processing station where they are cleaned and sorted for size. Keeping the beans clean is very important because these beans are used for human food.

Half of the dry edible bean crop grown in the United States each year is sold to other countries. Great Northern beans go to France, Greece and Northern Africa; pintos are shipped to Mexico and Spain.

On The Front

A. Mature Plant

Dry edible beans have viny plants that either grow upright like a bush or spread evenly across the ground. The more upright the plant, the more resistant it is to diseases. The plants typically grow 24 inches tall.

B. Bean Pod

The bean seed grows in a pod.

C. Pinto Beans

Pinto beans are various shades of brown and tan. Nebraska producers grow 60,000 to 70,000 acres of pinto beans in the western portion of the state. Pinto beans are commonly used in Mexican dishes, such as refried beans.

D. Great Northern Beans

Great Northern beans are oblong-shaped, plump and white. Great Northern beans are grown where the climate is cool and dry at harvest time. These beans are used in soups and other bean dishes.

E. Light Red Kidney Beans

The light red kidney bean is large and kidney-shaped. These beans are often used in chili and are commonly sold at grocery stores.