

of the beans greatly affect cooking time. Really fresh, thin beans, not much thicker than a strand of linguine, may be done in as little as two minutes. Most beans in the supermarket, though, have traveled some distance and are considerably thicker. Due to their age and size, they need five to six minutes to become tender. Tasters didn't like mushy green beans, but beans that were too crisp or raw-tasting were likewise unappealing.

After draining, the beans can be tossed with other ingredients. Finding it best to dress them while still hot, which maximizes flavor absorption, we liked pairing beans with strong and spicy ingredients, such as garlic-chili sauce or quickly pickled onions and walnuts.

Spicy Green Beans with Sesame Seeds

SERVES 4

TIME: 15 MINUTES

Avoid buying very thick beans, as they were harvested too late and will remain tough and chewy after cooking. Also, spend time choosing pods that are fairly uniform in size, as their thickness determines the cooking time. If using haricots verts—very thin green beans—reduce the boiling time to just 2 or 3 minutes.

- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds
- Salt
- 1 pound green beans, ends snapped off
- 1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil
- 1 1/2 teaspoons Asian garlic-chili sauce
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro leaves

1. Toast the sesame seeds in a small skillet over medium-high heat until golden and aromatic, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer the seeds to a small bowl and reserve.

2. Meanwhile, bring 2 1/2 quarts water to a boil in a large saucepan. Add 1 teaspoon salt and the beans and cook until tender, about 5

minutes. Drain the beans and transfer them to a large serving bowl. Toss with the oil, chili sauce, cilantro, and sesame seeds. Season with salt to taste and serve immediately.

Green Beans with Pickled Red Onions and Toasted Walnuts

SERVES 4

TIME: 15 MINUTES

Although the vinegar left over from the quick pickled onions is not used in this recipe, it is quite flavorful and can be stored in the refrigerator to be used in a vinaigrette or sauce.

- 1/2 cup red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- Salt
- 1/2 medium red onion, sliced thin
- 1/2 cup walnuts
- 1 pound green beans, ends snapped off
- 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh tarragon leaves
- Ground black pepper

1. Bring the vinegar, sugar, and 1/4 teaspoon salt to a boil over high heat in a small saucepan. Add the onion, return the mixture to a boil and then immediately remove the pan from the heat. Transfer the mixture to a small bowl to cool.

2. Toast the walnuts in a small skillet over medium heat until golden and fragrant, about 5 minutes. Set the nuts aside on a plate.

3. Meanwhile, bring 2 1/2 quarts water to a boil in a large saucepan. Add 1 teaspoon salt and the beans and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Drain the beans and transfer them to a large serving bowl. Strain the onions from the vinegar, reserving the liquid for another use. Toss the onions with the beans, toasted walnuts, oil, and tarragon. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.