

# Simplifying Sautéed Green Beans

Parboiling, shocking, drying, sautéing—do you really need a four-step process to produce tender, evenly cooked beans?

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Perfect sautéed green beans cooked in just one pan.

**T**he standard technique in most recipes for sautéed green beans goes something like this: parboil, shock in ice water, dry with towels, and finally, sauté. While the method has advantages—it allows you to do most of the prep work in advance—sometimes I want things a little more streamlined. Could I achieve tender, lightly browned, fresh-tasting beans, without all the fuss and in just one pan?

First, I tried simply sautéing the raw beans in a skillet in oil—big mistake. The dry heat took so long to penetrate the beans that their exteriors blackened before the interiors cooked through. Water was clearly going to be necessary. My next thought was to do a variation on parboiling. I threw beans and a small amount of water into a cold pan, covered it, and brought it to a simmer. Once the beans were almost cooked, I removed the lid and waited for the water to evaporate. I then added a little oil and sautéed the beans until browned. While promising, the method wasn't foolproof. If the water took too long to evaporate, the beans turned flaccid before they could brown. And even when I achieved lightly browned and properly cooked beans, the caramelized flavor seemed superficial.

Why not reverse the process and sauté the beans first? Following this line of thinking, I briefly sautéed the beans until they were spotty brown but not yet cooked through, then added  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup water to the pan. As soon as the water hit the skillet, it turned to steam, and I quickly covered the pan. Once the beans were almost cooked (an efficient process in this steamy environment), I removed the lid and let the excess moisture evaporate. This produced just the right crisp-tender texture I was looking for and, at

least initially, the caramelized flavor was deeper. But once I added water to the skillet, it seemed to wash off some of that intensified flavor, making my veggies taste more like ordinary steamed beans.

The solution: I simply steamed the beans for a minute or so less so they remained slightly undercooked, then blasted the heat once the lid was removed. This quickly evaporated what little water was left in the pan and allowed me to promote additional browning before the beans fully cooked through. I also found that adding a little softened butter to the skillet once the water had evaporated (softened butter was quicker to melt and faster to brown than cold) added some welcome richness and further aided browning.

As far as additional flavors, I decided to limit extras to herbs, spices, and a few pantry items. Mixed into the butter (or in some cases, oil), combinations such as garlic and herbs, smoked paprika and almonds, and ginger and sesame added complexity without tampering with the dish's one-pan simplicity.

## SAUTÉED GREEN BEANS WITH GARLIC AND HERBS

SERVES 4

This recipe yields crisp-tender beans. If you prefer a slightly more tender texture (or you are using large, tough beans), increase the water by a tablespoon and increase the covered cooking time by 1 minute. To serve 6, increase all of the ingredients by half and increase the covered cooking time by 1 to 2 minutes. Do not attempt to cook more than  $1\frac{1}{2}$  pounds of green beans with this method. For our free recipe for Sautéed Green Beans with Tarragon and Lime, go to [www.cooksillustrated.com/december](http://www.cooksillustrated.com/december).

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened
- 3 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through garlic press (about 1 tablespoon)
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme leaves
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 1 pound green beans, stem ends snapped off, beans cut into 2-inch pieces
- Table salt and ground black pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup water
- 2 teaspoons juice from 1 lemon
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley leaves

Combine butter, garlic, and thyme in small bowl; set aside. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until just smoking. Add beans,  $\frac{1}{4}$

teaspoon salt, and  $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon pepper; cook, stirring occasionally, until spotty brown, 4 to 6 minutes. Add water, cover, and cook until beans are bright green and still crisp, about 2 minutes. Remove cover, increase heat to high, and cook until water evaporates, 30 to 60 seconds. Add butter mixture and continue to cook, stirring frequently, until beans are crisp-tender, lightly browned, and beginning to wrinkle, 1 to 2 minutes longer. Transfer beans to serving bowl, toss with lemon juice and parsley; adjust seasoning with salt and pepper. Serve immediately.

## SAUTÉED GREEN BEANS WITH SMOKED PAPRIKA AND ALMONDS


Follow recipe for Sautéed Green Beans with Garlic and Herbs, omitting chopped thyme and parsley. Stir  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon smoked paprika into softened butter with garlic. Sprinkle cooked beans with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup toasted slivered almonds before serving.

## SPICY SAUTÉED GREEN BEANS WITH GINGER AND SESAME

Combine 1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil, 1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger, and 1 tablespoon chili-garlic paste in small bowl. Follow recipe for Sautéed Green Beans with Garlic and Herbs, substituting vegetable oil for olive oil and increasing amount to 2 teaspoons. Cook as directed, replacing butter mixture with sesame oil mixture and omitting lemon juice and parsley. Sprinkle cooked beans with 2 teaspoons toasted sesame seeds before serving.

## SAUTÉED GREEN BEANS WITH ROASTED RED PEPPERS AND BASIL

Combine 2 teaspoons olive oil, 1 medium shallot minced, and  $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon red pepper flakes in small bowl. Follow recipe for Sautéed Green Beans with Garlic and Herbs, replacing butter mixture with oil-shallot mixture. Add  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup roasted red peppers, cut into  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces, to pan with oil-shallot mixture. Substitute 1 teaspoon red wine vinegar for lemon juice and 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil leaves for parsley.

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### HOW TO MAKE

- Sautéed Green Beans with Garlic and Herbs