

Beans vs. No Beans: Your Arguments for the Best Chili



Chili lovers often have a strong opinion about one specific ingredient: beans. Last week [we asked you to debate whether or not beans belonged in chili](#). Today we're taking a look at your best arguments.

This Post Represents How You Feel

We didn't write this post to share our opinions on the chili bean war, but rather to aggregate what you, the readers, feel as a whole. This post attempts to represent both sides of the arguments equally, but may be weighted more towards one side or the other due to your responses. Please keep this in mind as you read and share your thoughts in the discussions.

Chili Without Beans Is Meat Sauce

Many readers felt chili wasn't chili without meat or beans. [Wolftech provides a simple argument for beans](#):

Chili without beans is not chili. It is meat sauce.

[JasOn_Myers argues the opposite](#), on behalf of the meat lovers:

Chili is short for CHILI CON CARNE...which is spanish for meat with chilis. Does it say Chili con carne con *frijoles*? **NO**. Beans do not belong in true chili. If you add beans, it's no longer chili, it's stew.

[ArmySheepy points out that chili is stew](#) regardless of its ingredients.

Additionally, our editorial fellow Andy Orin refutes [JasOn_Myer's argument](#), claiming that beans are a standard assumption:

The half of me that's Mexican cannot comprehend chili without beans. What would that be? A slurry of well-spiced sadness? Then I remember that chili as a condiment, say on your dogs and your fries, is indeed very

often beanless with no loss of enjoyment. We must bridge this cultural bean gap!

While chili with beans earns the title of chili inherently (in some cultures, at least), bean-less meat chili doesn't lose its title due to a lack of beans. That said, some consider it a condiment and not a meal.

Chili Without Beans Is an Abomination

Many meat lovers feel very strongly against the inclusion of beans. In fact, [reader SilverX2 shared](#) that a group called the International Chili Society. They insist traditional red chili cannot contain beans:

[Traditional Red Chili](#) is defined by the International Chili Society as any kind of meat or combination of meats, cooked with red chili peppers, various spices and other ingredients, with the exception of BEANS and PASTA which are strictly forbidden.

That said, they allow the inclusion of beans in other types of chili. Also, it's important to remember that the International Chili Society consists of regular, opinionated people who hold themselves to their own standards. As you'll learn later on in this post, no argument for the inclusion or exclusion of beans or meat in traditional chili is historically correct.

Beans Belong in Chili Up North, But Not Down South

Some chili recipes change based on your location. [Reader beowulf7777 explains that beans never belong in Texas chili:](#)

Not in Texas chili. Take that bean stew up north, yankee.

[Bogus Maximus agrees](#) that things are a little different up north:

I'm a New Yorker and I love me some beans in my chili.

So, your locale may inform your preference.

The Original Chile Recipe Refers to Stew with Chili Powder

Reader [ecsquared](#) notes that chili was originally a poor man's meal, and that means it needs beans:

Yes, Chili has to have beans. I don't believe the idea that original chili was just meat. Chili, like many famous dishes, originated as a "poor man's meal", and beans are an inexpensive filler...only makes sense to have them in chili!

But [according to Thom](#), there's so much meat in Texas that it doesn't matter:

We have had an ample supply of beef in Texas for centuries. Beans just dilute real chili so that babies and the elderly can stomach it.

[Toltepeceno](#) notes that chili started in Texas, but that doesn't tell us anything specific about an originating recipe containing chili. Food web site [What's Cooking America](#) decided to take a look at the history of chili and found the first chili-related commentary from 1926 American J.C. Clopper:

When they have to pay for their meat in the market, a very little is made to suffice for a family; this is generally into a kind of hash with nearly as many peppers as there are pieces of meat - this is all stewed together.

Clopper's comment focused on San Antonio's chile carne, so it seems American chili did originate in Texas *and* contained meat. Chili didn't require meat, however it served as a meat distribution device. That said, What's Cooking America found that the original stew came to Texas from the Spanish Canary Islands during the 18th century:

On March 9, 1731, a group of sixteen families (56 persons) arrived from the Canary Islands at Bexar, the villa of San Fernando de Béxar (now know as the city of San Antonio). They had emigrated to Texas from the Spanish Canary Islands by order of King Philip V. of Spain. The King of Spain felt that colonization would help cement Spanish claims to the region and block France's westward expansion from Louisiana.

These families founded San Antonio's first civil government which became the first municipality in the Spanish province of Texas. According to historians, the women made a spicy "Spanish" stew that is similar to chili.

Chili got its name because it made use of chili powder to add an extra kick. The inclusion of the spice appears to matter more than whether or not the stew contains meat, beans, or much of anything else.

You Can Make Chili However You Want

The argument comes down to this: chili can take many forms, and you can make it however you want. In the same way language evolves and changes, so do recipes. Even caviar, which [traditionally refers to fresh roe from wild sturgeon in the Caspian and Black Seas](#), now includes other types of fish roe and even [completely unrelated dishes](#). While some might consider a total change a perversion of the dish, we have to allow for a few small changes with ingredients as no single person enjoys the exact same food as another. [Reader BlueBeard sums up this argument nicely](#):

There is some weird chili-elitism where people insist their chili recipe is the only one true recipe to rule them all, and that is patently ridiculous (because *mine* is the best, cretins!). In the old days, maybe they didn't have beans handy and made the "bowl o' red" with just tomatoes and meat—these being cowboys, one would assume meat was never in short supply. Then, for others in different circumstances meat may have been too costly so it was supplemented with another protein source, the bean. Who cares, at long as there isn't corn in it. That's just wrong.

Chili is an entirely egalitarian meal—there is almost no wrong way to do it, as long as you like what you made. Personally, I love my own chili so much I generally end up eating the entire pot for 3 meals a day for a week, and want more while I'm eating the last bowl. God, I am overdue for some chili.

So do beans belong in chili? Only if you like them.