**Bean soup**

**Bean soup**is a Bulgarian staple. It is an excellent vegetarian dish, but it can also be spiced up with some sausages. Bean soup in Bulgaria is a "national" dish. Most popular is the Monastery Version which is totally vegetarian.

**Ingredients:**
1pound dried Great Northern beans, soaked in water for about 6 hours, rinsed and then cooked in water for 45 minutes to an hour until tender
2tablespoons olive oil
1 1/2 cups diced onion
1 1/2 cups diced carrot
1 1/2 cups diced celery
2 cloves garlic minced
1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
2 tablespoons sweet Hungarian paprika
1 tablespoon salt
1 teaspoon black pepper
10 cups water
1 large smoked ham hock
1/2 cup chopped fresh mint
3 tablespoons minced fresh winter savory ( or one teaspoon dried savory)
1/ 2cup chopped fresh flat leaf parsley
Additional salt, black pepper and paprika for reseasoning

**Preparation:**
After cooking your beans, heat the olive oil in a large soup pot and add the onion, carrot celery and garlic. Cook over medium heat until the onion softens. Add the crushed red pepper, paprika, salt and black pepper and continue to saute for just a few more minutes. Add the water and ham hock, bring up to a boil and simmer for about an hour, partially covered. Remove the ham hock from the pot to let cool. Turn the heat off from under the soup pot and stir in the beans, mint, parsley and savory.
Using an immersion blender, blend the soup for just a minute to break up some of the beans. (Alternatively remove about a cup of the beans to a bowl and mash them with a fork and then return them to the pot) Remove any meat from the ham hock, dice it finely and return it to the pot. Return the soup to a simmer and reseason with salt, pepper and paprika. NOTE: This soup is best when made very early in the day or even the day before serving.