



## Think Snow & Caribbean Black Beans

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So what's up with the weather this winter? Definitely not mountainous piles of snow. The long running joke about New Hampshire children's oversized Halloween costumes (so they can fit over snowsuits and galoshes) was more than a light hearted tale this year. It snowed again over Thanksgiving. And then well, more or less nothing ... or not much.

Meanwhile, the ski areas must be starting to feel a little like Sisyphus. In case you have forgotten, Sisyphus was the ancient Greek king known for his nasty temperament and murderous ways. As punishment the gods ordered Sisyphus to roll a big old boulder up a hill. Just short of the top, the boulder teetered, rocked and then rolled back down the hill. Sisyphus was forced to try again and again for all eternity. Instead of rolling rocks, the ski areas have been blasting their snow guns. They make some snow. It starts to build up. They make some more. Then it rains, not just a little but a lot.

I'm not sure what the ski areas did wrong but I wish they'd repent and soon.

This is not the first time New England has been plagued with a snow drought. A drive through the region's hills and mountains will reveal hundreds of now defunct ski areas. Sometimes faint, sometimes pronounced you can see the slopes from the road. A hike up and around the trails might reveal a few old sheds or a rusting Ford pick-up, maybe two. Mostly small family businesses, these ski areas delighted their local communities. Unfortunately, they fell apart when Mother Nature refused to cooperate with snow for one too many years.

My sister Brenda and I learned to ski at just such a place. Priest's Ski Area had no glitz or glamour but it did have an outhouse. An apple orchard in the off-season, the hill had more than half a dozen slopes and a handful of rope tows. There was nothing high tech about those tows. The ropes flew around the axels of ancient Ford pick-ups trucks. Gas was cheap in those days and a daily lift ticket cost a dollar.



With the pick-ups' engines racing in overdrive, the ropes spun at breakneck speed. Or at least fast enough jerk the arms out of a little girl's sockets. Filled with both trepidation and excitement, Brenda and I edged our way to the front of the line. Finally it was our turn to grab the perilous rope. There was no kindly lift attendant to help us, only a long line of increasingly impatient skiers to coax or, more likely, jeer us on. Taking a deep breath, we grabbed the rope and, hanging on for dear life, were whipped up the hill.

Of course there was no snow making or grooming equipment. What you got ... apple trees, a few rocks and some ice patches ... was what you got. The January Thaw played havoc with the slopes. An early spring was dreaded. With a little luck there'd be enough snow to ski for six, maybe eight weekendss. With a lot of luck, the season started with a white Christmas and lasted until mid-March.

When we got a bit more adept, Dad took us north to New Hampshire and King Ridge. It was a real step up. The trails were longer and there were no apple trees to dodge. King Ridge didn't have snowmaking, that came much later, but it had giant Snowcats and the slopes were lovingly groomed every night. Even more important, there T-bars, not death defying rope tows run by ancient Fords.

Like many ski hills throughout New England, both King Ridge and Priest's Hill fell victim to a string of poor snow years. The land was sold and, sadly, houses now sit on our old winter playgrounds.

Think snow and bon appétit!

## Caribbean Black Beans

*Side dish or the main event, these beans are perfect on a cold winter night. Whether you are hosting a party or a guest at a potluck, make up a batch for the Super Bowl. Go Pats! Enjoy!*

Serves 8-12



1 pound dried black beans  
12-16 ounces hot (or sweet) Italian sausage, casings removed  
Olive oil  
2 onions, peeled and finely chopped  
2 carrots, finely chopped  
2 stalks celery, finely chopped  
1 red bell pepper, finely chopped  
4 cloves garlic, peeled, finely chopped  
1 tablespoon (or to taste) chopped jalapeno pepper  
1 teaspoon dried oregano  
1 teaspoon ground cumin  
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste  
1 tablespoon brown sugar  
1 bay leaf  
2 strips orange peel, about 4-inches long  
Juice of 1 orange

Juice of 1 lime  
1/4 cup espresso  
1/4 cup rum  
Garnish: chopped cilantro

Pick over the beans and discard any stones or shriveled beans. Rinse well and soak in 6-8 cups of water in the refrigerator overnight.

Breaking up the sausage into pieces, sauté over medium heat until cooked through, remove from the pan, drain and let cool. When it is cool enough to handle, finely chop the sausage.

Heat a little olive oil in a large casserole over medium heat. Add the onions, carrots, celery, bell pepper, garlic, jalapeno, oregano and cumin, season with salt and pepper and sauté until the onion is translucent.

Drain and rinse the beans and discard the soaking water. Put the beans in the pot with the vegetables. Add 5-6 cups of water, the bay leaf, brown sugar and stir to combine. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to very low, cover and simmer until beans are tender about 1 – 1 1/4 hours.

Add the espresso, orange and lime juice and rum and continue cooking, uncovered, for an additional 15 minutes. Sprinkle with chopped cilantro and serve hot with rice.

*The beans are even better if you make ahead. Cool to room temperature, cover and store in the refrigerator for several hours or overnight. Gently reheat on low heat.*



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