

Gigantes Plaki | Greek Baked Beans

Swick

Serves 1 | Active Time: 45 minutes | Total Time: 10 hours

Chef's Notes

Gigantes plaki (yigandes plaki, γίγαντες πλάκι) is a traditional Greek dish consisting of oven-baked fasolia gigantes (giant) beans in a rich tomato sauce. Gigantes beans, which are native to Greece, are also called elephant beans (elephantes), which is the name reserved for extra-large giant beans.

The large white gigantes beans can be found at most Greek grocery stores. They can also be ordered online. If you have not tried them before, they are well worth any effort it is to find them — they are meaty and delicious.

Step 1: Soaking & Cooking the Beans

- 1 lb/454g dried gigantes beans, (or large butter or lima beans) To soak the beans, place them into a large bowl and cover with three times the amount of water. Let soak overnight, or for at least 12 hours. Once the beans are fully rehydrated, drain and rinse again with clean water.

To cook the beans, place them in a large pot and add enough water to cover. Bring the water to a boil and then turn the heat down and let the beans gently simmer for approximately 50 to 60 minutes, or until the beans are mostly tender and soft, but not at all mushy.

Once done, drain the beans and set them aside — being sure to save the cooking liquid. This flavorful liquid will be used later when cooking the dish.

Step 2: Gathering & Preparing Your Mise en Place

- 1 - 15 oz can diced tomatoes or 1 1/2 cups whole peeled tomatoes, chopped, with juice* Note: For the tomatoes, we most often use canned tomatoes. For the best final consistency, pulse the diced tomatoes a few times in the food processor before using.
 - 1 large onion, finely diced
 - 2 carrots, small dice
 - 2 large celery ribs, small dice
 - 5 cloves garlic, minced
 - 2 tbsp tomato paste
 - 1/2 tsp dried oregano
 - 1/2 tsp chile flakes
 - 1/2 tsp paprika
 - 3 bay leaves
 - 1/3 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
 - 2 tbsp chopped fresh dill
- As far as the ingredients and spices go, there are many versions of this traditional Greek dish — some recipes do not add carrots, while some recipe call for adding a bit of cinnamon. This is where you can get creative and experiment with different amounts and/or types of spices, flavorings or mirepoix.
- Flavor-wise, we really like this combination of ingredients.

Step 3: Making the Tomato-Based Sauce

- 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil*
- sea salt, to taste
- freshly ground black pepper, to taste

To start the sauce, heat a large ovenproof skillet or large frying pan, over medium heat. Then add the olive oil, followed by the onions, carrots and celery. Let the mirepoix cook for 10 minutes or so, or until soft and translucent — a bit of color is okay.

*Note: If desired, omit the oil and use a bit of vegetable stock instead.

Next, add the garlic and chile flakes and cook for about 30 seconds. Then add the tomato paste, cooking for about a minute before adding the tomatoes, oregano, paprika and bay leaves.

At this point, turn the heat down and let the sauce simmer for about 10 minutes or so, or until the sauce starts to thicken.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C).

Once the sauce is ready, add the fresh parsley and dill and taste for seasoning.

Step 4: Assembling & Cooking the Dish

- 1 to 2 cups cooking liquid from the beans

To assemble the dish, either add the beans to the pan in which that tomato sauce is in, or transfer them both to an ovenproof casserole or baking dish.

Next, add about a cup of the cooking liquid — enough liquid to just cover the beans.

Bake for the beans for 1 to 1 1/2 hours. Check the beans occasionally, adding more liquid more liquid if the mixture seems too dry. Once done, the liquid should be mostly evaporated and the beans should be tender, but not too dry — a bit of sauce is nice.

At the end, if desired, the oven temperature can be turned up to 400°F (200°C) for the last 10 minutes or so. This will allow any excess sauce to reduce and it will also crisp up the top nicely.

Note: When done, if the mixture seems a too dry, you can always add a bit more of the cooking liquid. It's also a good idea to save any remaining cooking liquid because it is very flavorful and can be used to reheat any leftover beans and/or for making other dishes.

In the end, the final consistency comes down to personal preference. Once you have a made it once or twice, you will find what you like best — saucier or less saucy.

Step 5: Serving the Dish

- extra virgin olive oil, for garnish
 - freshly chopped parsley, for garnish
- To finish the dish, drizzle with a bit of extra virgin olive oil, fresh parsley and a little coarse salt, if desired.

Either serve the dish on its own with some bread and a big salad, or serve as part of a multi-dish Greek feast.

Traditionally Gigantes Plaki is served only slightly warm or at room temperature, so be sure to let sit for at least 15 minutes before serving.

This dish goes particularly well with many of these delicious plant-based Greek recipes: Hummus, Tzatziki, Lemon Potatoes, Dolmades and Pita Bread.