The green bean was born in the hot regions of the Americas, India, and China. It was introduced to France by the Conquistadors about 1597. The French were the first to put green beans on their menus. For a long time, green beans were rare and expensive, becoming widespread only in the 19th century.

Digestible, low in calories, and a good source of some vitamins and minerals, green beans are diet-friendly. These beans are often called string beans because a fibrous string runs along the seam of certain varieties. The string is noticeable when you snap off the ends. The snapping noise is the reason for its other nickname, snap beans.

Fresh green beans are available from May to October. Green beans are also available canned and frozen.

It is best to handpick green beans from a market that sells them loose. To ensure uniform cooking time, select beans of similar size and shape. Choose slender beans (no thicker than a pencil) that are crisp and free of blemishes. The beans should be a bright green color. Do not buy beans that are stiff or have the seeds visible through the pod because those beans will be tough. Don’t select wrinkled or discolored beans.

Wash beans thoroughly in clear, cool water. Beans can be cooked whole, cut crosswise or diagonally, or French-cut (i.e., cut along the length of the bean). For a sweet crisp taste, cut them as little as possible. Use the French-cut for mature beans.

Stir-frying is one of the easiest ways to prepare green beans. This method maintains more nutrients than other cooking methods. Boiling, steaming, and microwaving are other common methods for preparing green beans. Boiled beans may release some nutrients into the water, so try to reuse the bean water. You might use the water to boil rice.

Green beans continue to cook after you take them out of the boiling water. Either remove them just before they are done or immediately plunge them into ice water to stop the cooking process.

Whatever cooking method you choose, remember to cook beans as little as possible, using the least amount of water. The fewer beans in the pan, the quicker they cook and the better they taste. Use separate pans to cook more than a pound.

Keep green beans dry in a perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator. They should stay fresh for four or five days.