

Fabada Asturiana



This hearty stew hails from Asturias, in northern Spain, where they grow the best white beans. The beans are dried and then used in this dish year-round. It really is the beans that make the dish – they are large, white and uniquely creamy and should be the most expensive ingredient in your stew since true fabas Asturianas sell for a small fortune. This dish does not take much effort, but do give it time – five or so hours if possible. There is probably nothing better on a dark, chilly evening than a steaming bowl of smoky fabada accompanied by a glass of deep red Rioja.

Serves: 8 as a main course

500g dried white beans, preferably fabas Asturianas if you can get them

olive oil

500g cured pork belly/pancetta/streaky bacon, preferably smoked and in one piece

2 yellow onions

2 fat cloves of garlic

a couple of bay leaves

a couple of sprigs of thyme

a couple of parsley stalks

a good pinch of saffron threads

½ tsp sweet paprika, preferably smoked

freshly ground black pepper

2 or 3 Spanish blood sausages (morcilla), depending on their size

2 or 3 Spanish chorizos, depending on their size

salt



1. Cover the beans with three times their volume of cold water and leave to soak overnight.
2. The next day, finely chop the onion, garlic and half the pork belly and sauté them together in a lug of olive oil in a large heavy casserole dish until the onion is soft and the pork slightly caramelised. Cut the remaining pork belly into 1" chunks.
3. Drain the beans and add them to the casserole along with the pork belly chunks, herbs and spices. Cover with cold water and bring to a boil. (Do not add salt.) Bring the stew down to a bare simmer and cook gently, uncovered and stirring only occasionally, for three or four hours until the beans are very nearly soft to their cores. Add more water every now and then if you need to, so that the beans remain *just* submerged. (Try more than one bean to test – they don't all cook at the same rate.)
4. Add the sausages and continue cooking very gently for another 30 minutes until the sausages are fully cooked and the beans are super-creamy yet still largely holding their shape. Taste and season.
5. Remove and discard the herbs. Remove the sausages and cut them into chunks – you should get three or four chunks out of each sausage. Return these to the pot. If the stew seems too liquid, crush some of the beans with a potato masher or fork. Serve in bowls, with each person getting at least one chunk of pork belly, morcilla and chorizo.