Cooking beans and rice at elevation

At our Mountain Camp near Cripple Creek, the elevation is about 9,500 feet. A pot can be bubbling away up here while the beans inside are still hard. Water boils at a lower temperature up high. Once it boils, cranking up the flame just sends more of your water out as steam.

Start with 1 cup of dry beans

1. **Sort, rinse and soak.** Pick out stones and rinse the beans. For an overnight soak, refrigerate them in 4 cups of water for 8 to 12 hours. For a same-day pot, boil them in 4 cups of water for 2 minutes, take the pot off the heat, cover and let it sit for 1 hour.
2. **Drain and start with fresh water.** Put the beans in a pot and add enough fresh water to cover them by about 2 inches. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat to a gentle simmer. Leave the lid slightly ajar if the pot foams. Add hot water as needed to keep the beans submerged.
3. **Check the center.** Scoop out a few beans and press them with a fork. They should mash easily all the way through. If the middle is still firm or chalky, simmer another 15 minutes and check again. Add tomatoes, vinegar or salsa once the beans are tender.

When to start checking

Count from the start of the simmer. These are first checks for soaked beans. Older beans and beans cooked high in the mountains can take considerably longer.

Bean	First check	What to do with the cooked beans
Great Northern	45 minutes	Add to a pot of chicken or vegetable soup.
Black	60 minutes	Spoon over rice with salsa.
Pinto	90 minutes	Mash with a little cooking liquid for burritos.
Navy	90 minutes	Stir into ham soup or baked beans.

Count the soak water, too. If you use 4 cups to soak and another 4 to cook, that's ½ gallon for one pot before you count rinsing or topping up.

A note about red kidney beans

Use canned kidney beans for a mountain meal. They're already cooked. Raw or undercooked red kidney beans contain a toxin that can make you sick. Keep dry kidney beans out of the stovetop method above.

Cooking rice at elevation

If you've lost the bag directions because the rice is stored in Mylar, use the chart below. It's for plain, uncooked long-grain rice. If your bag has directions for your elevation, follow those first.

Measure 1 cup of dry rice

Long-grain rice	Usual water	Mountain starting water	First check at a simmer
White	2 cups	2 1/3 cups	15 minutes
Brown	2 1/4 cups	2 2/3 cups	40 minutes

The mountain amounts give you roughly 15 to 20% extra water for a first batch. A loose lid loses more steam, so keep a little extra water handy. One cup of dry rice makes about 3 cups cooked.

1. **Bring the water and rice to a boil.** Use a pot with a snug lid. Stir once, cover and turn the heat down until the water just simmers. Leave the lid on until the first check. Lifting it every few minutes lets the steam escape.
2. **Check a grain and the bottom of the pot.** Bite a grain to see if the center is tender. Tilt the pot slightly to see whether water still pools at the edge. Those two checks tell you what to do next.

What's happening in the pot?

Crunchy rice, dry pot. Add 2 to 3 tablespoons of hot water. Cover, simmer another 3 to 5 minutes and check again. Repeat if the center is still hard.

Crunchy rice, water left. Put the lid back on and simmer another 3 to 5 minutes. There's already water in the pot for the grains to absorb.

Tender rice. Take it off the heat. Drain any pooled water, cover and let it rest for 5 to 10 minutes. Fluff it with a fork before serving.

If you're down to your last canister

Cook the white rice and open a can of beans. Stir the drained beans into the cooked rice and warm them through. Save the dry pintos for a day when you have enough fuel for a long simmer.

Write down what worked with your pot

Elevation (ft) _____ Rice type _____ Total water (cups) _____ Simmer (min) _____