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Through the Garden Gate: Such A Fun Way to Learn

By Susan Martin | February 2017-Vol.3 No.2



One of my very favorite garden activities is to appreciate the creativity, work and weed-pulling of OTHER gardeners. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to do just that through PMG's *Through the Garden Gate* series. Historically, five gardens each year have been opened to the public from spring through fall. I met with Billie Dietz and Kathi Marshall, co-chairs of this amazing series, to see what they have learned from visiting so many gardens.

Q: How many years have you two headed up this wonderful project?

Billie: I've been involved since 2008, which is 8 years.

Q: So you've been involved with over 30 gardens!

Billie: I guess I have!

Kathi: I've been working with Billie for about 6 years.

Q: As I understand it, you two are responsible for identifying potential garden gems, talking with the owners to see if they'd be interested in letting people visit, and then evaluating the gardens through on-site visits. That's a lot of volunteer hours!

Billie: It is, but we love doing it.

Q: What are some of the key characteristics that you look for when assessing whether a garden might be appropriate for the tour?

Billie: You might have an absolutely beautiful garden, but there are some very practical criteria that must be met. It has to be accessible and have sufficient parking. It also has to be in Albemarle County.

Kathi: We also like to make sure there are some shady spots so that people can get out of the sun, enjoy some refreshments and rejuvenate themselves.

Q: So access, parking and shade are practical considerations. What about design elements?



On the tour . . .

Kathi: Each garden is different, which is what makes it so interesting. There is no right or wrong. Each gardener makes it work for the natural setting he has and for what he likes personally.

Billie: That's right. We've shown some really big gardens that are taken care of with professional help and have been co-designed by the owner and a professional garden designer. But more frequently, we've shown gardens that are owner-designed and -maintained. Both are beautiful, but the second is a great way for gardeners to learn at a scale that's similar to their own.

Q: That's true. I've seen both types of gardens on the tour, and I'm always able to learn something from each. But is there some common design element that seems to stand out when you arrive at a new garden for the first time?

Billie: We probably look at about 70 - 80% of the gardens in the winter.

Q: Really! That's amazing to me. What do you see? The form?



Kathi: There's just a flow. The owner can describe what plants are included, but we can see the garden from the structure and the flow.

Billie: We also feel the owner's enthusiasm. True gardeners love to show their gardens. You can tell a lot about what a garden will be like from the owner's enthusiasm.

Q: I guess you are each at least partially describing intuition, something you've learned by doing. Are there any tips you've brought back to your own gardens?

Kathi: I find it hard to turn down a plant! I love trying different things. One of the most practical tips I got came from visiting a garden that had lots and lots of bulbs. The owner said she used an auger drill, so I tried that. It makes planting bulbs so much easier. I also admired the way a Japanese maple was pruned and that gave me an idea.

Billie: I was really impressed with a red horse-chestnut tree (*Aesculus x carnea*). (Here's a [link](#) that describes the tree-it is impressive!)

Q: The gardens are shown in spring, summer and fall. Do you look for gardens that specialize in certain seasonal plants?

Kathi: That works out sometimes. We chose a garden for early spring that would be abloom with hellebores, some of which are quite rare. Another amazing garden featured fields of lavender, and so that was open in June. We give the owners the choice of when they'd prefer to be on tour, and so their specific interests come to the fore.

Billie: A really well-designed garden can be shown any time of the year. The June garden for this year's series, for example, could be shown in any season.

Q: Are there any new trends you've noticed? I'm sure people are using more native plants?

Billie: We certainly do see lots of native plants.

Kathi: What we mainly see is that gardens are personal and you have the freedom to do what you want with plants you like. Most people seem to think their gardens aren't good enough to show on tour. But if you are really passionate about gardening, your garden probably reflects that.

Q: Well, I think that will be a very encouraging thought for our readers! If someone wants to offer his or her garden for the tour, how much preparation is required?

Billie: You have to make sure it is accessible, has parking and some shade.

Kathi: And you need to make sure that paths are easy to walk on. You might need to smooth things out, or add gravel or something like that. Just keep an eye out for what might be tricky for a visitor to navigate.

Q: Do you need to be a Master Gardener to offer your garden for the tour?

Kathi: Most of the gardens on our tour have NOT been owned by Master Gardeners. It's a mix.

Q: When can we look forward to our first garden tour this year?

Billie: They are held the second Saturday of the month in May, June, July and September, from 9 to 12 noon. Admission is \$5. Please check the website at pmgarchives.com for more details as we get closer to the dates.

Q: Well, it's just such a wonderful way to spend a Saturday morning! We encourage our readers to consider opening their gardens. If interested, call the Extension office at (434) 872-4580 to leave a message for Billie or Kathi. And we should all thank Billie and Kathi for making such a fun, educational experience available. Let's make sure to take advantage of the 2017 season!

Tiptoeing Through the Tiarella

By Patsy Chadwick | February 2017-Vol.3 No.2



When I think of plantings for shade gardens, I invariably think of *Tiarella cordifolia*, or foamflower. I love its delicate foliage and airy clouds of dainty flowers. I love how it lights up the various nooks and crannies of a woodland garden. I love how it looks fresh and inviting regardless of the summer heat and humidity. Sadly, my current ornamental garden is too sunny for this sweet plant. So I must enjoy it vicariously when I spot it growing in more suitable settings elsewhere.

A shade-loving perennial, *Tiarella* is native throughout the eastern United States and Canada and hardy in USDA zones 5 to 9. Its botanical name means little crown, a reference to the shape of its seeds. Its common name comes from the airy, foamy-looking racemes of tiny white to pink flowers held above the foliage on thin, wispy stems.



Close Up of *Tiarella cordifolia* (Foam Flower) blossom

Relatively low growing, *Tiarella* averages about 6 to 12 inches in height and 12 inches in width. In the wild, it appears as a low-growing, mounding or spreading evergreen perennial on the banks of streams and in moist woodland conditions. In the cultivated ornamental garden, the evergreen foliage lends an interesting display of texture and color throughout the year. Light to medium green during the growing season, the foliage takes on a bronze or purple hue in the winter. Depending on the variety, the leaves are either mildly or deeply lobed with uneven toothed edges. While the foliage is interesting in its own right, the flowers are the icing on the cake. The floral show generally lasts for several weeks in spring before fading. Even the faded flowers can add interest to the landscape.

Two *Tiarella* varieties are native to the east coast of North America. Both were honored with the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit in 1993:

- *Tiarella cordifolia* var. *cordifolia*
 - Known by the common names of Allegheny foamflower and heart-leaved foamflower, it has dense clumps of heart-shaped leaves that have three to five mild indentations, toothed edges, and often display dark burgundy or maroon veining or patches. The flowers are white to pale pink. This species is characterized by aboveground runners, called stolons, which allow the plant to spread as a ground cover.



Tiarella cordifolia

- *Tiarella cordifolia* var. *collina* -



Tiarella wherryi

Also called *T. wherryi*, or Wherry's foamflower, this species is taller with foliage that is more deeply lobed, resembling the leaves of maple, fig, or oak trees. A well-behaved clump-forming variety, it will not outgrow its assigned space in the garden and is therefore a better choice if space is limited. This variety typically produces more racemes of flowers than the runner type.

Another native species, *Tiarella trifoliata*, which is also called western foamflower or three-leaf foamflower, is native to the Pacific coast. Somewhat taller than the east coast species, it ranges in height from 9 to 20 inches. It is less tolerant of heat and humidity than the eastern species and therefore not suitable for east coast gardens.



Tiarella trifoliata

Tiarella polyphylla, or Asian foamflower, is a related species that is native to China, Japan and the Himalayas. Asian foamflower looks similar to our native Allegheny foamflower, but it is not as heat and humidity tolerant. It is a clump-forming species that spreads slowly.

Thanks to the interest and attention that plant hybridizers have given *Tiarella*, many hybrids with interesting leaf colors and shapes have been created by crossbreeding the native eastern species with other related species.

TIARELLA, HEUCHERA, HEUCHERELLA - WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

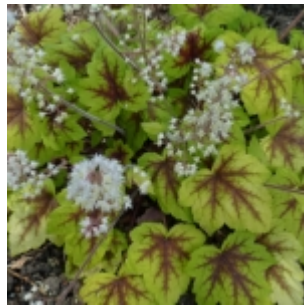
In addition to cross-hybridization among *Tiarella* species, hybridizers have created a number of cross-hybrids with *Heuchera*, commonly known as coral bells. And therein lies much confusion. Botanically, *Tiareella* and *Heuchera* are closely allied since they both belong to the *Saxifragaceae* genus. In general, they enjoy similar growing conditions although *Tiareella* prefers a moister environment and can tolerate more shade than *Heuchera*. The two species form low-growing mats of foliage and they both have tiny flowers that appear on wands held above the foliage. *Heucherella*, the intergeneric cross between the two species, combines the best characteristics of both plants in terms of flowers and foliage. The common name for this cross between foamflower and coral bells is "Foamy Bells." *Heucherella* tends to have deeply divided foliage that is more brightly colored and patterned with blotches and contrasting veining than either parent. The flower stems also tend to be shorter than those of either parent.



Tiareella Cordifolia
(Foamflower)



Various Heuchera Selections
Heucherella 'Stoplight'



CULTURAL REQUIREMENTS OF TIARELLA

Tiareella does best in moderate to full shade with morning sun only. It prefers rich, organic soil with a pH of 6.2 to 6.5, and evenly moist, but not soggy, growing conditions. This plant does not like wet feet. Established plants are somewhat tolerant of drought conditions, but they will spread more slowly than when given moist growing conditions. If planted in dry shade, improve the soil by incorporating plenty of organic matter. To maintain a high humus level, mulch yearly with chopped leaves or compost in late fall or early spring. While organic matter is recommended to lighten clay soil, fertilizer is not normally needed for this plant.

TIARELLA PESTS AND DISEASES

Other than occasional issues with slugs and snails, *Tiareella* species are generally free of insect pests and diseases. The leaves are astringent, which means that deer and rabbits generally don't eat them unless they are extremely hungry and no other suitable food sources are available.

While *Tiareella* enjoys moist soil, it can suffer from Phytophthora root rot if the soil does not drain well.

TIARELLA PROPAGATION METHODS

Commercial plant nurseries often use tissue culture to grow new *Tiareella* plants. But the homeowner may start new plants by planting seeds, rooting runners, or dividing clumps. Seeds should be shallowly sown in early spring or in autumn and protected in a cold frame. The fresher the seed, the better. They tend to sprout quickly although the seedlings may be slow growing. Aboveground runners (stolons), may be dug up and rooted any time during the growing season. Plant them about one to two feet apart and they will eventually fill in the spaces between plants. Clumps may be divided late in the fall.

USES FOR TIARELLA IN THE LANDSCAPE

Tiarella is a versatile plant that can be used to great effect in the landscape. One of the most intriguing uses for it that I've ever seen was many years ago in a tiny postage stamp-size garden in Georgetown, a historic neighborhood of Washington, D.C. The immaculate little garden was planted with just two species, *Tiarella* and tulips, both of which showed brilliantly against a backdrop of perfectly clipped dark green boxwoods. The *Tiarella* clumps, which were planted in a grid formation, had lime green foliage with burgundy veining. Taller, soft pink 'Angelique' tulips emerged at precise points within the composition and in perfect harmony with the shorter *Tiarella*. The interplay of pink, burgundy and lime green against the dark green of the boxwoods was absolutely stunning.

Such a formal treatment is unusual for what is first and foremost a wildflower. *Tiarella* is more likely to be used in an informal garden setting. For example:

- Use the spreading (stoloniferous) type as a ground cover or mass planting beneath deciduous trees and shrubs in a woodland setting.
- In the shady mixed border, intersperse either singly or in small groupings among other herbaceous shade-loving perennials such as hostas, ferns, coral bells (*Heuchera*), *Epimedium*, dwarf crested iris (*Iris cristata*), woodland phlox (*Phlox divaricata*), *Corydalis*, and Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum*).
- Mix with other plants to help control erosion of soil along the banks of streams, thus improving water quality.
- Incorporate with other moisture-loving plantings in a shady to partially shady rain garden.
- Considered a "must-have" native plant in a wildflower setting, use it with other shade-loving wildflowers to provide nectar to bees, flies, and other pollinators in spring.
- Showcase as a key component of a shade garden container or urn.
- Nestle among stones in a shady rock garden. The delicate little flowers contrast nicely with the stones, softening the overall effect. For a garden with boulders, use a larger, denser clumping cultivar such as *T. wherryi* 'Oakleaf' to provide a better balance with the scale of the boulders.

SOURCES

Herbaceous Perennial Plants, A Treatise on their Identification, Culture, and Garden Attributes, Third Edition (Armitage, Allan M., 2008)

Native Plants of the Southeast (Mellichamp, Larry, 2014).

Perennials, The Gardener's Reference (Carter, Susan; Becker, Carrie; and Lilly, Bob; 2007)

Plant Propagation (The American Horticultural Society; Toogood, Alan, Editor-in-Chief; 1999)

Taylor's 50 Best Perennials for Shade (Tannenbaum, Frances, Series Editor, 1999)

Albemarle County Recommended Native Plants Database, albemarle.org/nativePlants

United States Department of Agriculture Plants Database, plants.usda.gov

Virginia Cooperative Extension Publication 426-043, [Rain Garden Plants](#)

The Ornamental Garden in February

By Patsy Chadwick | February 2017-Vol.3 No.2

February may be the shortest month of the year but, for die-hard gardeners, it seems to drag on forever. Perhaps that's because we long to feel warm sunshine and spring breezes on our faces. At this time of year, we hunger for the first glimpse of new leaves pushing through the soil and the scent of rich earth awakening from its winter slumber. But spring is yet a month away and winter still holds its icy grip on us. In the meantime, we bide our time daydreaming about new plants to try, old plants to divide, and new gardens to design. Ornamental gardening is an on-going process. So use this month wisely to both dream and plan.



Galanthus (Snowdrop) Peeking Through Snow

PROJECTS TO DO OUTDOORS IN FEBRUARY

Cut back dormant ornamental grasses. New growth will begin sooner when the old foliage is removed. The easiest way to cut back large clumps of dormant grasses is to tie a bungee cord around the clump and use an electric hedge trimmer to cut it back to a few inches above ground. For smaller dormant grasses, such as Japanese forest grass (*Hakonechloa*) or Muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia*), use hedge clippers to cut them back to about 3 to 6 inches. Try not to cut too close to the crown. Otherwise, moisture may settle in the crown causing it to rot. Small evergreen grasses, such as sedge (*Carex*), blue oat grass (*Helictotrichon*), lily turf (*Liriope*), and mondo grass (*Ophiopogon*), may not need to be cut back. Instead, some of the old spent growth may be pulled out by hand. If that method doesn't work and you do need to cut the old growth back, cut by about two-thirds. The plants may look as if you gave them a Mohawk haircut, but new growth will cover up the cuts. Again, avoid cutting too close to the crown.

Prune dormant trees and shrubs - In general, late winter is the ideal time to prune trees and shrubs before they start actively growing. However, the right time of year to prune depends on the species of plant and the reason for pruning it. The Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) has a number of helpful publications that can help take the mystery out of pruning. For example: [Pruning Basics and Tools](#), [Deciduous Tree Pruning Calendar](#), [Shrub Pruning](#), [Shrub Pruning Calendar](#), and [Evergreen Tree Pruning Calendar](#). For these and other VCE publications on pruning, see the James City County/Williamsburg Master Gardeners' [Pruning Handbook](#). Meanwhile, here are a few general pruning guidelines:

- Branches or limbs that are dead, damaged, or a safety hazard may be pruned any time of year.

- Deciduous trees and shrubs that require heavy pruning should be pruned in winter while the plants are dormant.
- Deciduous trees and shrubs that only need a light shaping may be pruned in the summer. Some trees such as maples and yellowwoods heavily bleed sap when cut. Research the species first for information on the proper time of year to prune it.
- Conifers (evergreens) generally don't require pruning except to remove dead or damaged branches, remove multiple or weak leaders, or correct structural defects. However, should you find it necessary to prune a conifer, do not cut back into old wood having no leaves or needles. Conifers don't form new buds on old wood, so prune only green, pliable new growth. Consult VCE Publication 430-461, [Pruning Evergreen Trees](#) for additional information on pruning conifers and other evergreens.
- Spring or summer-flowering shrubs that bloom on last year's wood may be pruned within a couple of weeks after flowering is finished. If you prune later than that, you may risk losing next year's blooms.
- Fall is never a good time to prune because it encourages new growth, which cannot harden off so late in the season.

PROJECTS TO DO INDOORS IN FEBRUARY

Make a list of perennials that need to be divided once spring arrives. Fall-blooming plants generally respond best to division in the spring when the new growth is emerging. You'll know a plant needs to be divided if:

- The flowers are smaller than they used to be
- A hole or dead space has developed in the center of the plant
- Plant growth is not as vigorous as it once was
- The plant has spread beyond its intended space in the garden

Get organized now for spring planting later. Make a list of plants you want to grow from seed and buy seed packets before the best selections are all gone. Inventory your seed-starting supplies to make sure you've got everything you need to start seeds indoors. Check to make sure your gardening tools are cleaned and ready for action.

Make a plan to improve your view - In the wintertime, we spend a lot of time looking at the view beyond our windows. Take a look at your view with a critical eye. Does it please you? If not, does it simply need a little editing or does it need a complete do-over? Do you like the plantings that are in place? Are there too many? Not enough? Not the right kind? Too overgrown? Too skimpy? Do you yearn to see a flowering tree in spring? A colorful shrub in autumn? Does the house need better illumination outdoors? Does the walkway need repair? Perhaps you visualize a trellis or other landscape feature. If you find your view lacking, make a list of what appeals about it and what doesn't and then form a plan of action.

Create a Terrarium - A terrarium is basically an indoor garden in miniature. Terrariums fall in and out of favor and right now, they're in favor. Whether you're a slave to fads or not, a terrarium is a fun project to tackle while you're waiting for spring. The University of Missouri Extension Publication G6520 provides good information on terrarium basics and includes a detailed list of plants suitable for terrariums and dish gardens (extension.missouri.edu/p/g6520). To get you started, here are a few terrarium fundamentals:

- Choose a clear glass, open-top container. It can be any glass container as long as it's deep enough to accommodate plant roots. You can buy containers specially designed for terrariums, but look around your house to see if you already have something suitable. A vase, jar, goldfish bowl, aquarium, or even an old compote dish will work.

- Place a 1 to 2-inch layer of small pebbles in the bottom of the container for drainage. You can add some activated charcoal as well for further absorption.
- Add some damp potting soil.
- Carefully add a few small plants of various sizes and shapes. Tamp the soil firmly in place around the roots.
- Finish off the composition with a layer of pebbles or moss.
- Place the container where it will be warm but out of direct sun.
- Lightly water as the soil dries but don't overwater.

Try growing an Air Plant (*Tillandsia*).

Tillandsias, better known as air plants, are popular right now but most people don't fully understand their cultural requirements. First of all, they are epiphytes (plants that anchor themselves to other plants for physical support), which means they don't grow in soil. So, yes, they do live on air, hence the common name. Therefore, you probably assume that because they don't need soil, they also don't need to be watered. And that's where you would be wrong.

Air plants evolved in the upper canopy of rain forests or in the cloud-covered Andes Mountains where they receive plenty of moisture from the air. But the dry air in your home is unlikely to provide enough humidity. So, mist them with clear water and notice how they turn from silver (dehydrated) to green (hydrated). Misting doesn't provide enough hydration for air plants, however. About every 10 to 14 days, submerge the entire plant in tepid water for about 10 to 20 minutes. Then, place it upside down on a rack or towel to let the excess water drain away. Under watering an air plant is always better than over watering. You can tell the plant needs water if the leaves begin to develop a pronounced curve or if they turn brown on the tips. In addition to moisture, air plants need bright, indirect or filtered light. As for nutrients, use a water-soluble fertilizer developed for epiphytes and bromeliads. Add the fertilizer to the water before you submerge the plant.



Tillandsia (Air Plant)

Keep tabs on the health and well-being of your houseplants.

Inspect them for pests every time you water them. Common pests include white flies, scale, fungus gnats, spider mites, and mealy bugs. Treat as needed at the first sign of a problem. The University of Minnesota extension publication on [Houseplant Insect Control](#) offers sound advice on houseplant pests and includes photos of the most common ones. Clemson Cooperative Extension publication HGIC 2252 [Common Houseplant Insects](#) is another useful source for advice.



Mealybug larva on houseplant

Assess your houseplants to see which ones would benefit from propagation. Over time, houseplants may grow too large for their containers, too heavy to be comfortably moved about, or just simply leggy and awkward looking. Rather than struggle to keep such a plant growing, a better idea is to start all over by propagating a new plant or plants. Houseplants may be propagated in many different ways. To name just a few:

- Offsets - Some plants, such as aloe, produce offsets that may be excised or gently broken away from the base of the mother plant and rooted.
- Plantlets - For plants that produce “babies,” such as spider plants, just snip off the baby and root it.
- Cane cuttings - The segmented stems of plants such as dieffenbachia may be cut into sections and rooted.
- Stem cuttings — Plants such as geranium or coleus have leaf nodes on their stems, from which new roots will grow.
- Leaf cuttings - African violet, begonia, Christmas cactus, and mother-in-law’s tongue are just a few of the many plants that can be started from leaf cuttings.
- Division - Roots of plants such as ferns and peace lilies may be separated into multiple plants and re-potted.

To learn more about plant propagation, see Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-002 on [Propagation by Cuttings, Layering and Division](#). It provides excellent information on propagation methods in general. Also, Missouri Cooperative Extension publication G6560 on [Home Propagation of Houseplants](#) describes propagation methods for houseplants specifically. Many good books on propagation methods are available. One excellent choice is *Plant Propagation*, which was published by the American Horticultural Society in 1999. This reference book provides a wealth of “how to” information with accompanying photos and clear line drawings.

Red Beans and Rice

By Cate Whittington | February 2017-Vol.3 No.2



Red beans and rice on New Year's Day were a mandatory and much anticipated part of my childhood. According to my mother, born and raised in New Orleans, this legendary beans and rice combo, consumed on the first day of January, ensured good luck throughout the coming year. I have never been able to verify this custom with any other New Orleans natives, so I wonder if she didn't just prefer red beans to the black-eyed peas and rice (Hoppin' John) commonly served throughout the South with the same fortuitous intent on New Year's Day. Nonetheless, I have continued the tradition and my New Year's celebration is never complete without Riz et Pois Rouges!

A Google search for this emblematic dish of New Orleans mentions not one word about good luck, but every article confirms the Queen City's long-held tradition of serving red beans and rice every Monday, 52 weeks of the year. As the story goes, Monday was traditionally washday, and women did not have time to both cook supper and carry out the laborious duties of washing clothes by hand. So, Sunday's ham bone was added to red beans, soaked overnight, and simmered all day with the 'holy trinity' of Louisiana cooking: onions, parsley, and celery. Served over rice, the meal was thrifty, convenient, and provided a complete protein.

Every family has its own favorite recipe for this dish, popularized in the early nineteenth century. According

to an article in *Inside Northside*, The Picayune's Creole Cook Book contains seven different recipes for red beans and rice! The ham bone of the past is often replaced with smoked (preferably Andouille) or pickled sausage. Added spices reflect the French, Spanish, African, and Caribbean influences evident in Creole cooking. Some people prefer to mash the beans to give them a creamy texture.

The recipe I am sharing with you is tweaked from one I found, written in pencil on a splattered index card by my aunt some 30 years ago, and attributed to Paul Prudhomme, an American celebrity chef who specialized in Creole cuisines.

Ingredients

1 pound dried red kidney beans	1 Tablespoon salt
½ pound salt pork or ham hock	2 teaspoons Hungarian paprika
3-4 quarts water	1 teaspoon black pepper
¼ cup butter	1 teaspoon dried thyme
1 large onion, chopped	½ teaspoon dried oregano
1 bunch green onions with tops, chopped	2 bay leaves
1 cup celery, chopped	1 Tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
1 cup chopped green pepper	3-4 generous dashes of Tabasco
2 large cloves garlic, crushed	1 cup parsley, chopped

Directions

Sort and wash the beans. Put them in a large pot, covered with 2 inches of water, and soak them overnight. Drain and add 3-4 quarts of water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium, and cook for 1½ hours, stirring occasionally. Melt butter in a large skillet and sauté the vegetables until tender. Add vegetables and seasonings to the beans and cook uncovered on a slow simmer for 2-3 hours, stirring occasionally and adding water if necessary. Remove the bay leaves and stir in chopped parsley. Serve over boiled rice.

Serves 6.

Resources:

www.southernliving.com/food/holidays-occasions/red-beans-and-rice

neworleansonline.com/cuisine/traditionalfoods/redbeansrice.html