

Peas

There are many varieties of peas, and all are members of the legume family. This family includes plants that bear pods enclosing fleshy seeds. Some peas are relatively new to American markets and some are traditional garden choices. Regardless of the particular variety, they are colorful and nutritious additions to any mealtime repertoire.

The common garden pea is also called English pea or simply green pea. While they can be found in grocery stores all year, locally this is a springtime favorite and one of the earliest crops harvested. A late summer planting of peas will provide a fall harvest, too.

When selecting fresh peas, look for pods that are firm, plump, and unblemished. They should be bright green with a slightly velvety feel. The peas should not rattle loosely in the pod. They should be glossy, crunchy, and sweet.

Because the sugar in peas begins to convert to starch as soon as they are picked, it's important to buy peas as fresh as possible and use them quickly. If they must be stored, refrigerate them unshelled in a plastic bag for no more than three days. Wash and shell them just before using.

One pound of green peas will yield about 1-1/4 cups of shelled peas. Fresh peas can be eaten raw, steamed, boiled, or cooked in the microwave. Keep in mind their flavor, and nutritive value, is lost when overcooked, so avoid this mistake.

Of course, green peas can also be found in the supermarket's frozen food section or with the canned goods. Peas are a fair source of vitamins A and C, as well as niacin, iron, and fiber.

Pod peas are grown specifically to be eaten pod and all. Two popular kinds of pod peas are the sugar snap pea and snow pea. While they can often be used interchangeably, they are different.

Snow peas are thin and flat. Look for crisp, brightly colored pods with peas that are barely visible through the pod. Smaller pods are the sweetest and most tender. Use them in salads and stir-fries, or lightly sautéed with other vegetables like carrots or squash. Wash them just before using, and trim both ends of the pod by snipping with kitchen shears.

Sugar snap peas are a cross between green peas and snow peas. They have plump peas inside but the pods are tender and sweet. Look for crisp, firm pods with a bright green color.

Sugar snap peas need to have the strings removed before eating, either cooked or raw. The string runs around both sides of the sugar snap pod. It is easiest to start from the bottom tip and pull the string up the front, and then snap the stem off and pull the string down the back of the pod. Serve sugar snap peas raw or cooked only briefly to retain their crisp texture.

Both sugar snap peas and snow peas should be purchased for immediate use, but can be stored in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to three days. A pound of pod peas equals about 15 pods or about one cup.

There are other types of peas, such as split peas and chickpeas, which are usually grown to be dried rather than harvested fresh. Chickpeas, also known as garbanzo beans, are widely available canned and are a wonderful addition to salads and soups. Rinse them before using to remove excess sodium and starch.

Here are some recipe ideas you might find interesting to try and maybe those at your dinner table will say, "More peas!"

Summer Squash with Snow Peas (From WVU Extension Service, Dining with Diabetes program)

2 teaspoons canola oil	1/4 cup green onions, chopped
3/4 pound yellow squash (about 5 tender squash)	1/4 teaspoon dried oregano
1 cup fresh snow peas, washed and trimmed	1/4 teaspoon dried thyme
1/2 clove garlic, minced	1/8 teaspoon salt
	1/8 teaspoon pepper

In a large skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add sliced squash and snow peas to pan; sauté until tender-crisp. Add green onions, garlic, oregano, thyme, salt, and pepper and continue cooking for 2 to 3 minutes. Yield: 4 servings

Nutritional analysis per serving: 50 calories, 2 g protein, 5g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 2 g fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 90 mg sodium.

Peas Amandine

2 cups shelled peas	1/4 cup almonds, slivered
3 bacon slices, chopped	1/2 cup low-fat milk
1/4 cup onion, minced	

In a medium skillet, fry bacon pieces and onion until light brown. Drain fat. In a medium saucepan, add peas to 1 inch of boiling water. Cover and cook 5 minutes. Drain water. Combine all ingredients and heat until milk is steaming. Season as desired. Yield: 4 servings

Nutritional analysis per serving: 163 calories, 9 g protein, 17 g carbohydrate, 5 g fiber, 7 g fat, 9 mg cholesterol, 148 mg sodium.

Dilled Peas with Walnuts

2 cups fresh peas, shelled	1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup onion, chopped	1/4 teaspoon pepper
1 tablespoon margarine or butter	1/4 cup broken walnuts, toasted
1/2 teaspoon dried dillweed	

In a small amount of boiling water, cook peas and onion, covered, for 10 to 12 minutes. Drain and add margarine, dillweed, salt, and pepper. Heat until all ingredients are warm. Garnish with walnuts.

Yield: 4 servings

Nutritional analysis per serving: 120 calories, 6 g protein, 12 g carbohydrate, 4 g fiber, 7 g fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 245 mg sodium.

Sautéed Pea Pods and Red Peppers

1 pound fresh snow peas, washed	1 medium onion, cut into 1/4-inch slices and separated into rings
2 tablespoons vegetable oil	
2 tablespoons margarine or butter	1/2 teaspoon celery salt
2 red peppers cut into 1/4-inch strips	1/8 teaspoon pepper

Cook pea pods about 2 minutes in boiling water, uncovered. In a skillet over medium heat, melt butter and oil together. Stir in onions and red peppers and cook about 3 minutes. Stir in cooked pea pods, celery salt, and pepper, then heat until pea pods are hot, about 1 minute.

Yield: 8 servings

Nutritional analysis per serving: 82 calories, 2 g protein, 7 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 3 g fat, 8 mg cholesterol, 160mg sodium.

Layered Salad

3 cups fresh spinach or lettuce	1/2 cup mayonnaise-type salad dressing
1 cup cauliflower florets	1/2 cup yogurt, plain
1 cup fresh green peas, cooked	1 teaspoon sugar (optional)
4 green onions, sliced	2 tablespoons bacon bits

In a deep bowl, layer fresh spinach or lettuce, cauliflower, peas, and green onions. Mix yogurt and salad dressing and, if desired, sugar. Seal top of salad with salad dressing/yogurt mixture. Sprinkle on bacon bits. Toss just before serving. Yield: 6 servings.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 102 calories, 4 g protein, 12 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 6 g fat, 10 mg cholesterol, 242 mg sodium.

Other recipes from the University of Kentucky, Cooperative Extension Service

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