

# perfect peas

Packed with flavor, these little green powerhouses also deliver a hefty dose of vitamin K, folic acid, and B vitamins



Sugar Snap Pea and Shiitake Stir-fry Salad, p. 66

**Your introduction to** peas when you were a child was probably not terribly auspicious. First, there was that insidious nursery rhyme: "Pease porridge hot, Pease porridge cold, Pease porridge in the pot, Nine days old"—hardly an appetizing prospect. Then, there was that poor princess in the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, all bruised and sleep-deprived due to that single, horrible pea tormenting her from beneath 20 mattresses and 20 eiderdowns. No wonder children of all stripes firmly clamp their lips against such horrors!

Yet the much-maligned pea was not always considered thus.

## Global Green Globes

In ancient Egypt, peas were entombed with the departed for nourishment in the afterlife. In Greece's Golden Age,

street vendors offered hot pea soup to passersby. Peas were mentioned in the most flattering terms numerous times in the Bible. Centuries later, precious petits pois were the rage in Louis XIV's 17th century court—no royal banquet would have been complete without these tiny green globes, and aristocratic ladies regularly noshed on them at bedtime.

The Chinese were probably the first to appreciate peas and pods in their fresh state. Europeans primarily utilized peas in a dried state (that infamous pease porridge) until, mercifully, the Middle Ages passed. Numerous varieties (1,000 at last count) were appreciated for their delicate flavors. Nowadays, we embrace them for their sweet savor and their generous health benefits, which encompass a wide array

By Neil Zevnik

of functions, from heart health and bone maintenance to cancer prevention and antifatigue effects.

## A Variety of Vitamins

Vitamin K is the biggest player here, in improving both heart and bone health; its ability to activate osteocalcin contributes to stronger bone structure and is instrumental in healthy blood clotting. Folic acid and vitamin B6 both have a similar one-two punch—they reduce the buildup of homocysteine, a compound that can lead to both the bone loss of osteoporosis and the arterial damage of atherosclerosis.

Peas also contain a substantial dose of vitamin C. This nutrient has been shown to reduce the risks for virtually all forms of cancer—it protects cell structures from damage, helps the body deal with environmental pollution, and enhances immune function. And peas contain a coalition of B vitamins that contribute to efficient metabolism, along with a hefty dose of iron, which combats anemia—thus, an efficient antifatigue mechanism is created.

## Mind These Cues for Peas

All of this is well and good, but the conundrum is how to coax your little ones (and yourself) to appreciate the humble pea in spite of its undeserved, but pervasive, bad rep. The answer: Choose wisely, prepare correctly and creatively, and serve often.

Let's confine ourselves to two varieties—the ubiquitous green garden peas, which are eaten removed from the pod, and sugar snap peas, which are enjoyed pod and all. When choosing garden peas, select firm, velvety, medium-green

### DID YOU KNOW?

If you can't get fresh garden peas, always choose frozen over canned—they retain more flavor and nutrition, and have lower sodium.

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peas; avoid any that are yellow or speckled, or puffy and water-soaked. Sugar snap peas should be bright green and crisp. Both varieties should be consumed quickly after buying, as their sugar will turn to starch; in the meantime, store in your refrigerator's crisper in a sealed bag.

**Garden peas:** To prepare, rinse the pods, snap off the top and bottom, and pull the thread along the seam to open the pod and remove the peas. To cook: The classic method is to heat them in a saucepan with layers of fresh lettuce leaves and a few

tablespoons of water, but normal steaming works just fine. Don't overcook, though; you want to preserve their splendid color and nutrition. Steam 4 to 5 minutes, depending on size.

**Sugar-snap peas:** To prepare, rinse, then remove the threads along the seams, if necessary. Sugar-snap peas cook best with a quick steaming or a hot stir-fry for no more than a minute or two.

Try the following recipes, and you'll likely come to appreciate how pleasing and palatable peas can be. ♦

**Creamy  
 Orecchiette with  
 Garden Peas**

Fast and fresh, this is a perfect side dish for grilled herbed chicken breasts or pan-seared lamb chops.

Serves 6

- 1 lb. organic whole-grain orecchiette pasta
- 1 Tbs. olive oil
- 2 Tbs. minced shallots
- ¼ cup organic dry white wine
- ¼ cup organic heavy cream
- 1 cup cooked organic garden peas
- ½ cup chopped fresh Italian parsley
- Freshly grated organic Parmesan cheese

1. Cook pasta according to package directions. Meanwhile, heat oil in small saucepan. Sauté shallots until translucent, about 3 minutes. Add wine, bring to a boil, and reduce by half. Add cream, bring back to a boil, then turn off heat.
2. Drain pasta, reserving 2 Tbs. cooking water. Toss pasta with cream sauce, cooking water, peas, and parsley. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and Parmesan.

PER SERVING: 362 CAL; 12 G PROT;  
 7 G TOTAL FAT (3 G SAT. FAT); 62 G  
 CARB; 14 MG CHOL; 207 MG SOD;  
 4 G FIBER; 4 G SUGARS

**Sugar Snap Pea  
 and Shiitake  
 Stir-fry Salad**

Pair this salad with a slab of teriyaki tofu or a steak right off the grill for a satisfying summer supper.

Serves 4

- 1 Tbs. toasted sesame oil
- 2 Tbs. peanut oil
- 8 large shiitake mushrooms, sliced into half-inch strips
- 8 oz. fresh sugar snap peas
- 1 Tbs. snipped fresh chives
- 1 Tbs. light soy sauce
- 8 oz. mixed baby greens
- 1 Tbs. fresh lime juice
- 2 tsp. toasted sesame seeds, optional

1. Heat sesame and peanut oils in large skillet or wok over medium-high heat. Add mushrooms, and stir-fry until softened, about 3 minutes. Add peas, and stir 1 minute more. Remove from heat, and stir in chives and soy sauce.
2. Toss greens with lime juice, and divide among four plates. Top with mushroom-pea mixture, and sprinkle with sesame seeds.

PER SERVING: 153 CAL; 3 G PROT;  
 11 G TOTAL FAT (7 G SAT. FAT); 14 G  
 CARB; 0 MG CHOL; 239 MG SOD;  
 4 G FIBER; 5 G SUGARS

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