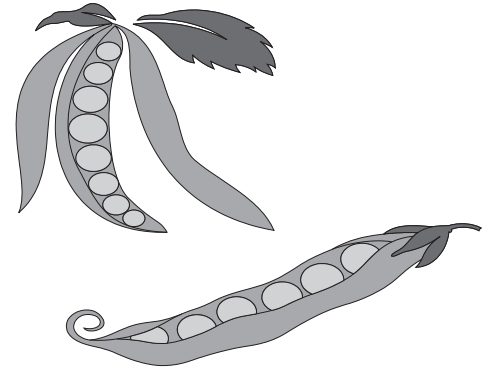


Peas

Pisum sativum

How luscious lies the pea within the pod.

Emily Dickinson



Nutrition:

Peas begin to lose their sugar content as soon as they are picked, with approximately half of their sugar content turning into starch within six hours if they are kept at room temperature. So be sure to eat them quickly, or at least refrigerate them as soon as possible. Peas are a very good source of vitamin C and protein, while also providing a significant amount of dietary fiber, iron, potassium, and other trace minerals. Peas are an important source of folic acid, vitamin K₁, which helps to build strong bones, and vitamin B₆, which enhances bone structure and contributes to a healthy cardiovascular system. Peas are an energy food, with their many vitamins supporting metabolic processes that bring energy to our cells! (1,2)

Varieties:

Green Peas: These are the old-fashioned shelling peas with inedible pods. The large, round, sweet peas must be shelled before cooking them or using them raw. Though quite delicious, they take a bit more work and time to prepare.

Snow Peas/Sugar Snaps: These are edible pod peas which can be eaten raw or cooked. Their pods are long and rather flat. The peas inside the pods are very small as the peas are harvested before they can mature. These fast-to-prepare peas are great for fresh eating and are well loved in stir-fries. (1,5)

Storage:

Peas are really best when eaten straight away - such as on your way home from the farm! If you really must store them, place them unwashed in a perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator and use them within two to three days. Do not shell peas until you are ready to eat or prepare them. (1,3,5)

Preparation:

Rinse peas before preparing them. To shell **green peas**, use your fingers to pinch off the stem, then pull the string down to open the pod. The peas can then be removed with your thumb. Snow peas and sugar snap peas should be trimmed after they have been washed. For **snow peas**, simply cut the tips off of the ends of the pods with a sharp knife. For **sugar snaps**, the ends will need to be cut, and the strings that run down either side of the pod from the stem will also need to be removed. Start at the tip of the pea and pull the string up to the stem, then snap off the stem and continue pulling the string down the other side. Peas can be eaten raw or cooked. Edible pod peas can be served whole, or cut into thirds. (1,3,5)

Cooking Methods:

If you choose to cook your peas, do so very quickly. This will help to retain their freshness and flavor. If overcooked, peas will not only be mushy and gray, but they will have lost most of their vitamin C as well.

Blanch: Peas can be quickly blanched in boiling water. Green peas will be tender in 2 to 5 minutes, while snow peas and sugar snaps will be bright green (done!) in 30 seconds to 1 minute. Remove from the heat, drain, and cool immediately in ice water to stop the cooking action.

Steam: All three types of peas can be steamed using a small amount of water or broth for extra flavor - the less water used, the more nutrients will be retained. Do not add salt to the liquid as it causes peas to toughen. Green peas will be done in about 5 to 10 minutes. Snow peas and sugar snaps will be done in 1 to 2 minutes. If a steam basket is used for snow peas or sugar snaps, the cooking time will be slightly longer - 2 to 3 minutes.

Stir-fry: Stir-fry whole snow peas and sugar snaps, or cut them into thirds first. They will cook very quickly - only 1 to 2 minutes and they will be a beautiful, bright green.

(3,5)

Tips and Suggestions:

- * Raw snow peas and sugar snaps are an excellent addition to **vegetable trays**.
- * Try serving blanched peas with **sautéed nuts or seeds**, such as: walnuts, slivered almonds, sesame seeds, and sunflower seeds.
- * Peas are excellent when added to **sautéed onions and mushrooms**.
- * Toss some **fresh peas** in your favorite casserole, stir-fry combination, stew or vegetable sauté.
- * Serve blanched peas in all kinds of **salads**.
- * Cooked peas are good when **seasoned** with any of the following: basil, chives, curry powder, mint, parsley, lemon, tarragon and thyme.
- * To impart a **stronger pea flavor**, add a few unshelled peas when cooking, then toss out the pods when the cooking is done. This method is also used to add pea flavor when making a chicken or vegetable stock.

(1,3,5)

Yields:

1 pound fresh pea pods = about 1¼ cups shelled peas

Joy of Gardening Cookbook