



## Zion Farmers Market Veg-u-cation

### Easy to Peas



The pea is one of the major groups within the vast legume family. Peas can be divided into three general categories: whole pea pods eaten young and fresh, shelled peas eaten fresh, and shelled peas that are dried.

Peas eaten fresh as whole pods include the broad, flat snow peas that star in Chinese stir-fries as well as plumper, rounder, bright green sugar snap peas.

The most common variety for shelling is the English, or garden, pea. Baby peas, or *petits pois*, refer to tiny, sweet English peas, while so-called early, or June, peas are larger and have more starch. The smaller ones need barely any cooking and are wonderful stirred into risotto at the last minute with a little grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. Most are harvested for freezing.

The final category of peas, those that are usually dried, include yellow and green split peas, chickpeas and black-eyed peas. These are better grouped with beans and lentils because of their similar flavors and uses. Black-eyed peas are sometimes available fresh in the summer. If you buy them still in the pod, you will need to shell them before using them.



## Selecting

Choose fresh peas with crisp, smooth, glossy, bright green pods. Avoid any that are wilted, dried, puffy or blemished. For the sweetest flavor, try to purchase them from a farmers' market.

Canned peas bear so little resemblance to fresh peas that it is better to go without if they are the only option. Frozen shelled peas, on the other hand, are decent substitutes, especially if they will be cooked with other ingredients. Look for those labeled "baby" or "petite" for smaller, more delicate peas. Snow peas are available frozen as well, but frozen snow peas turn fairly soft and flavorless once cooked.

## Storing

Because their natural sugar begins converting to starch immediately after they are picked, peas should be prepared and eaten as soon as possible, preferably the day of purchase. Peas will stay crisp for 3 to 4 days if stored in a plastic bag in the refrigerator, but do not expect them to retain their characteristic sweetness after a day.

## Preparing

For whole pea pods, snap off the tips of the pods, pulling down the length of the pod to remove any tough strings as well. Although many modern hybrids have no strings or the peas are processed before reaching the store, it is best to check. Whether pods or shelled, peas are best if steamed or blanched very briefly to retain their crisp texture and vibrant color.

For English peas, shell them just before cooking to prevent them from drying out. Work over a large bowl. After checking for and removing any strings as described above, squeeze the pod and press your thumb against the seam to split it open. Continuing the same movement, sweep your thumb down along the inside of the pod to pop out the peas. Discard the pod. (If making soup, save a few to sweeten the simmering stock.) If needed, refrigerate the peas for up to 1 day. Cover with damp paper towels or cold water to keep them moist.



Find out more facts about the pea now:

1. The Latin name for the pea is *pisum sativum*.
2. The pea is thought to have originated from Middle Asia.
3. The oldest pea was found in Thailand. It was 3000 years old!
4. The Romans grew over 37 varieties of peas.
5. Gregor Johann Mendell used peas in genetic research.
6. The sweet tasting pea was first grown in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Thomas Edward Knight.
7. Elizabeth I had peas imported as they were very expensive.
8. 35,000 hectares of peas are grown in the UK in a single year.
9. Peas are best grown in late spring.
10. When peas begin to grow wild and unruly, gardeners use bamboo canes and netting to support the growth of the plant.
11. The most popular peas grown in gardens are:
  - a. Oregon sugar pod
  - b. Douce provence

- c. Meteor
  - d. Feltham First
  - e. Sugarsnap
12. Field peas are used in factories, for freezing.
  13. Dried peas are used to make mushy peas, which are infamous as a side dish alongside fish and chips.
  14. There are many types of tinned peas including processed, marrowfats and mushy.
  15. Peas can be eaten straight out of the pod.
  16. One serving of peas contains as much as Vitamin C as two large apples, more fibre than a slice of wholemeal bread, and more thiamine than a pint of whole meal.
  17. It is estimated that over 9000 peas are eaten per person, per year in Britain.
  18. 7175 peas were once eaten in a minute with chopsticks by Janet Harris of Sussex. This was a world record!
  19. The proper etiquette for eating peas is to squash them on the back of your fork.
  20. The first frozen peas were frozen in the 1920's by Clarence Birdseye.
  21. In 1969, the first television commercial broadcast in colour was for Birds Eye frozen peas.
  22. The UK is the largest producer of peas for freezing.
  23. In 1989, there was a television programme about peas that lived in overgrown flowerpots at the bottom of a garden. It was called *The Poddington Peas*.
  24. In 1990, *The Rescuers Down Under* featured a restaurant scene. During this, a pea dropped from a table. A talking insect took the pea and made his own pea soup for his "diners" aka mice.
  25. It is believed that peas that are boiled with onions, and spiced with cinnamon, is a powerful aphrodisiac.

