**DRIED PEAS**

In Yuma County, dried beans and peas are a common spring crop for many producers, with about 1000 acres in production.

When fresh peas are not available or when a starchier, hardier flavored legume is needed in a recipe, dried peas are the perfect choice; they are available any time of the year.

Although they belong to the same family as beans and lentils, they are usually distinguished as a separate group because of the ways in which they are prepared. The different types of peas are all spherical, a feature that also sets them apart from beans and lentils.

Dried peas, a small but nutritionally mighty member of the legume family, are a very good source of cholesterol-lowering fiber. Not only can dried peas help lower cholesterol, they are also of special benefit in managing blood-sugar disorders since their high fiber content prevents blood sugar levels from rising rapidly after a meal.

Fiber is far from all that dried peas have to offer. Dried peas also provide good to excellent amounts of four important minerals, two B-vitamins, and protein—all with virtually no fat. Dried peas also feature isoflavones (notably daidzein). Isoflavones are phytonutrients that can act like weak estrogens in the body and whose dietary consumption has been linked to a reduced risk of certain health conditions, including breast and prostate cancer.

Check a chart of the fiber content in foods and you'll see legumes leading the pack. A single cup of cooked dried peas provides 65.1% of the daily value for fiber.

In addition to their stellar fiber content, dried peas also feature other heart healthy nutrients. They are a good source of potassium, which may decrease the growth and development of blood vessel plaques and is also good for lowering high blood pressure. A cup of cooked peas will supply you with 20.3% of your daily need for potassium.

In a study that examined food intake patterns and risk of death from coronary heart disease, researchers followed more than 16,000 middle-aged men in the U.S., Finland, The Netherlands, Italy, former Yugoslavia, Greece and Japan for 25 years. When researchers analyzed the data in relation to the risk of death from heart disease, they found that legumes were associated with an 82% reduction in risk!
Dried peas are available either whole or split, the latter being appropriately called "split peas." While we generally associate dried peas with a deep green color, they are also available in a yellow color, which offers a more delicate flavor and is the type generally preferred in northern European countries.

Peas are known scientifically as *Pisum sativum*. The modern-day garden pea, from which dried peas are made, is thought to have originated from the field pea that was native to central Asia and Europe. Dried peas have been consumed since prehistoric times with fossilized remains being found at archeological sites in Swiss lake villages. Peas are mentioned in the Bible and were prized by the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Greece and Rome.

For millennia, dried peas were the main way that people consumed this legume. It was not until the 16th century when cultivation techniques created more tender varieties of garden peas that people began to consume peas in their fresh state as opposed to just eating dried peas.

It seems that the Chinese, a culture that had consumed this legume as far back as 2,000 BC, were the first ones to consume both the seeds and the pods as a vegetable. Peas were introduced into United States soon after the colonists first settled in this country. In the 19th century during the early developments of the study of genetics, peas played an important role. The monk and botanist, Gregor Mendel used peas in his plant breeding experiments.

Before preparing dried peas, whether whole or split, inspect and remove any debris or dirt. Whole peas need to be soaked in cold water for at least eight hours before cooking, while split peas do not need this extra preparation. To prepare peas, place the legumes in a saucepan using three cups of fresh water for each cup of peas. Bring to a boil and then reduce to a simmer and cover. Whole peas generally take about an hour to become tender while split peas only take about 30 minutes. Foam may form during the first 15 minutes of cooking, which can simply be skimmed off.

Use split peas to make dahl, the classic Indian dish. Or, Purée cooked peas with your favorite herbs and spices and serve as a side dish. Whole peas can be added to vegetable soups.

Split pea soup, whether homemade or from a container, is a delicious way to enjoy this nutritious legume.
In early times peas were grown mostly for their dry seeds. In modern times however peas are usually boiled or steamed which breaks down the cell walls and makes the taste sweeter and the nutrients more bio-available. Along with broad beans and lentils these formed an important part of the diet of most people in Europe during the Middle Ages. By the 1600s and 1700s it became popular to eat peas "green", that is, while they are immature and right after they are picked. This was especially true in France and England, where the eating of green peas was said to be "both a fashion and a madness.” New cultivars of peas were developed by the English during this time which became known as "garden peas" and "English peas."

The popularity of green peas spread to North America when Thomas Jefferson grew more than 30 cultivars of peas on his estate. With the invention of canning and freezing of foods, green peas became available year-round, not just in spring.

Fresh pea pods do not keep well once picked, and if not used quickly are best preserved by drying, canning or freezing within a few hours of harvest.

What is the difference between a pea and a bean? Peas and beans differ in three ways:

- **Different climate conditions necessary for growth**
  - Peas = cool season legumes - more tolerant of cold temperatures
  - Beans = warm season legumes meaning they require much warmer temperatures

- **Growing Structure / Support**
  - Peas plants / pods grow on a vine
  - Beans typically grow in a pod on a bush

- **Difference in Growing Season**
  - Peas mature and are ready for harvest in 70 - 90 days
  - Beans mature and are ready for harvest in 85-115 days

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