



# Vegetables for Wellness: Kentucky Peas

Sandra Bastin, Ph.D., R.D., L.D.  
 Extension Food and Nutrition Specialist

Peas grown in the home vegetable garden or bought from the local farmers' market can add nutrition and variety to any meal. Sweet peas that are fresh picked and Kentucky grown are a delicacy. In Kentucky, fresh peas are harvested during May and June and again in August. Peas, native to western Asia, were often a dried food in the Middle Ages. Fresh peas were not eaten in Europe until the 16th century and were considered a luxury food.

Green garden peas and pod peas are the two common varieties. Green garden peas need shelling and are considered a legume. Garden peas, which are also called English peas, are grown for their seeds, the peas we eat. They should be harvested when the pods are well filled but the seeds (peas) are still tender and sweet. Green garden peas have both smooth-seeded and wrinkled-seeded varieties. Wrinkled-seeded varieties are generally preferred for most cooking. The smooth-seeded varieties tend to have more starch and are not as sweet, making them better in split-pea soup.

Pod peas, such as the snow pea, sugar snap pea, and Chinese pea pod, are eaten whole, either cooked or raw. Snow peas and sugar snap peas have edible flat pods with small, immature peas inside.

Peas should be picked immediately before cooking because their sweetness deteriorates quickly. *Vegetable Cultivars for Kentucky Gardens—1999* (ID-133), a publication by the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service, has more information on successful Kentucky varieties. It can be viewed at <[www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/pubs.htm](http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/pubs.htm)>.

## Nutrition Facts

Green garden peas are a good source of fiber, containing 2 grams per 1/2-cup serving. They are also low in fat. Research indicates that individuals who eat diets high in fiber and low in fat have a lower risk for heart disease and certain cancers. Snow peas usually have no fiber but are high in iron and vitamin C. A cooked, 1/2-cup serving of snow peas meets 20 percent of our daily need for

vitamin C. This vitamin, also known as ascorbic acid, plays a vital role in fighting infection, keeping gums healthy, and healing wounds. Vitamin C also functions as an antioxidant. This is another good reason to try to consume all the different varieties of peas that are available from the garden or your local farmers' market. You can check for peas at the farmers' market nearest you on the Web at <[www.ca.uky.edu/gardenbasket](http://www.ca.uky.edu/gardenbasket)>.

## Selection

Fresh, young, tender pea pods should be moist and bright green in color. They should feel a little fuzzy to the touch and be well filled, end to end, with peas. Do not purchase peas that are flat, dark green, wilted, gray-flecked, or scarred. Peas to be eaten in the pod should be thin. In season, farmers' markets have a good selection of peas available, allowing you to purchase enough for dinner or to can or freeze for the same fresh taste in the winter. One bushel of green peas in the pod will yield 12 to 15 pints of frozen shelled peas. Pod peas also freeze well.

## Storage

Fresh peas and snow or pod peas keep well for up to two days in the refrigerator. The sooner peas are eaten, the more sweetness they retain. Peas will remain fresher if kept in their shells until preparation time. They should be stored unwashed in a vegetable crisper or a plastic bag. To retain quality, freeze peas when you need to store them for a long time. Canning and drying peas results in only fair to poor quality.

## Preparation

Fresh peas can be eaten raw, steamed, boiled, or cooked in the microwave. Pod peas can be cooked the same way as fresh peas, and they can also be stir-fried. Two pounds of peas yields about 1<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> cups of shelled peas.

**Fresh peas:** When you are ready to cook them, rinse the pea pods in cold water. Then shell them

into a bowl. Snap off the pod's stem and pull it down the side. Press the pod at the seam, pulling it open on either side. The peas should pop out. Peas can be cooked in boiling water, uncovered, until just tender, about 4 to 10 minutes. Fresh peas can also be steamed (5 to 10 minutes) or microwaved on high (4 to 6 minutes) until tender.

**Pod peas:** When ready to cook, wash the pods in cold water. Peas should not be shelled, but you should remove the stems and string from both the top and bottom of the pods. Use kitchen shears to clip each end of young, tender pea pods. Cook peas in boiling water, uncovered, until just crisp-tender, 30 seconds to 2 minutes. Pod peas can also be steamed (2 to 5 minutes) or microwaved on high (4 to 6 minutes).

## Dilled Peas with Walnuts

**2 cups fresh peas, shelled**  
**¼ cup onion, chopped**  
**1 tablespoon margarine or butter**  
**½ teaspoon dried dillweed**  
**¼ teaspoon salt**  
**¼ teaspoon pepper**  
**¼ cup broken walnuts, toasted**

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

## Sautéed Pea Pods and Red Peppers

**1 pound fresh pea pods, washed**  
**2 tablespoons vegetable oil**  
**2 tablespoons margarine or butter**  
**2 red peppers cut into ¼-inch strips**  
**1 medium onion, cut into ¼-inch slices and separated into rings**  
**½ teaspoon celery salt**  
**⅛ teaspoon pepper, freshly ground**

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

## Cream of Pea Soup

**2 tablespoons margarine**  
**1 tablespoon onion, chopped**  
**2 cups fresh or frozen peas**  
**½ teaspoon sugar**  
**2 cups water**  
**1 cup low-fat milk**  
**Salt to taste**

Over medium heat, melt margarine in a medium saucepan. Stir in onions and cook until translucent. Carefully add peas, sugar, and water. Cover and cook about 8 to 10 minutes, or until peas are tender. Remove from heat and purée in a blender until smooth. Return to the saucepan, add milk, and season to taste. Bring to a simmer before serving. *Nutritional analysis per serving: 150 calories, 6 g protein, 13 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber, 8 g fat, 25 mg cholesterol, 184 mg sodium.* Yield: 4 servings.

## Peas Amandine

**2 cups shelled peas**  
**⅔ cup bacon slices, chopped**  
**¼ cup onion, minced**  
**¼ cup almonds, slivered**  
**½ cup low-fat milk**

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. *Nutritional analysis per serving: 163 calories, 9 g protein, 17 g carbohydrate, 5 g fiber, 7 g fat, 9 mg cholesterol, 148 mg sodium.* Yield: 4 servings.

## Peas and Carrots

**1 pound carrots, trimmed, peeled, and sliced**  
**1 pound of fresh or frozen peas**  
**4 tablespoons butter**  
**Salt and pepper to taste**

Cook carrots, covered, in about 2 inches of boiling water until they are tender, about 10 to 12 minutes. Drain carrots. Cook peas in 1 cup of boiling water until crisp tender, about 6 to 8 minutes. Drain peas. Combine cooked peas and cooked carrots. Add butter and seasonings and reheat until warm. *Nutritional analysis per serving: 159 calories, 5 g protein, 18 g carbohydrate, 6 g fiber, 8 g fat, 21 mg cholesterol, 238 mg sodium.* Yield: 6 servings.

# Layered Salad

**3 cups fresh spinach or lettuce**  
**1 cup cauliflower florets**  
**1 cup fresh green peas, cooked**  
**4 green onions, sliced**  
**½ cup mayonnaise-type salad dressing**  
**½ cup yogurt, plain**  
**1 teaspoon sugar (optional)**  
**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. *Nutritional analysis per serving: 102 calories, 4 g protein, 12 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 6 g fat, 10 mg cholesterol, 242 mg sodium.* Yield: 6 servings.

For additional in-season recipes, check the home page of Family and Consumer Sciences Extension on the Web site of the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture at [www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/fcs/](http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/fcs/).

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