

FOOD FEATURE

OH,
SWEET,
PEA



KITCHEN DIVA PHOTO
When buying fresh green peas, look for firm, brightly colored pods. Small pods tend to be the most tender and usually will have a fresher taste. Plan to prepare your garden peas right away, as the sugars in all varieties begin turning to starch after harvesting.

BY ANGELA SHELF MEDEARIS AND GINA HARLOW
THE KITCHEN DIVA

If there is a poster vegetable for spring, one that embodies the fresh flavors we are so ready for after a season of roots and leafy greens, it would be the garden pea. This crop loves the still-cool temperatures of the first weeks of the new season, and its plants produce prolific white or lavender blooms that are lovely to look at ... if you are lucky enough to grow them. Those flowers give way to showy, bright-green bulging pods.

There are three main types of garden peas. First there is the classic green pea that produces a pod full of plump, round, green peas. This is the part of the plant we eat, discarding the pods, which tend to be tough. These peas are sometimes called English peas. Fresh peas from the field or garden are sweet, creamy and bursting with the fresh taste of the season. For those of us who don't have the opportunity to purchase fresh peas, they can be found in the frozen section of your grocery.

The snow pea and the sugar snap pea, which is a cross between the snow pea and the garden pea, are varieties that have the same fresh deliciousness of garden peas. But it's the pods, with their texture and crunch, that are so tasty.

When buying fresh green peas, look for firm, brightly colored pods. Small pods tend to be the most tender and usually will have a fresher taste. Plan to prepare your garden peas right away, as the sugars in all varieties begin turning to starch after harvesting.

Although they come from the same family, the nutritional values of peas vary. Green garden peas contain high amounts of vitamin A, as well as good amounts of antioxidants. However, because the pod of the snow pea and sugar snap pea are eaten, they provide the nutritional benefits of high fiber and vitamin C that garden peas do not.

This recipe for Fresh Pea and Lettuce Salad provides a delicious showcase for various varieties of peas. It's perfect as a stand-alone salad or as a side dish with chicken or fish.

— Angela Shelf Medearis is an award-winning children's author, culinary historian and author of seven cookbooks. Her new cookbook is "The Kitchen Diva's Diabetic Cookbook." Her website is www.divapro.com. To see how-to videos, recipes and much, much more, Like Angela Shelf Medearis, The Kitchen Diva! on Facebook. Read Gina Harlow's blog about food and gardening at www.peachesandprosciutto.com. Recipes may not be reprinted without permission from Angela Shelf Medearis

FRESH PEA
AND LETTUCE SALAD

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 tablespoon olive oil

5 small stalks green garlic, thinly sliced, or 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1/2 cup fresh or frozen green peas

1 cup fresh snow peas

1 cup sugar snap peas

2 small heads butter lettuce (about 6 ounces), washed, cored and torn into large pieces

3 green onions, roots removed and discarded, white and green parts diced

1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
1. Heat 1 tablespoon butter and 2 tablespoons oil in a 12-inch skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and season with 1/2 teaspoon of the salt and pepper. Cook, stirring often, until soft but not browned, about 3 minutes.

2. Add peas and cook until bright green and tender, about 4 minutes. Stir in remaining butter, along with lettuce and 1 tablespoon water. Season with remaining salt and pepper. Remove from heat. Stir until lettuce is just wilted, about 1 minute. Sprinkle with the green onions and lemon juice. Serves 4.

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