

Carrboro

FARMERS' MARKET

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Recipe of the Week

May 26, 2007

Pasta with Peas, Parmesan, and Bacon

from Sheri Castle of Creative Cooking with Sheri Castle

There are peas a plenty in the Market right now. Although it's hard to resist simply eating them raw to savor their crunchy sweetness, it's good to cook a few also. This dish (inspired by a photograph in a recent foodie magazine) combines up to three types of peas: sugar snaps, garden peas and pea tendrils. The tendrils of a pea plant taste like a cross between peas and spinach. If you can't find any, substitute another leafy green, such as spinach, arugula, watercress or Romaine (yes, lettuce—Europeans cook lettuce and peas together all the time).

Ingredients

1 (16 ounce) box short pasta, such as Orecchiette or Bowties
12 slices bacon,* chopped
8 shallots, halved and sliced
2 1/2 cups (about 10 ounces) sugar snap peas*
6 cups (about 6 ounces) pea tendrils or other spring green*
1 1/2 cups (about 8 ounces) shelled petite peas*
1/2 cup thinly sliced fresh mint*
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 1/2 cups shaved Parmesan cheese, plus more for passing

Procedure

1. Cook the pasta in a large pot of boiling salted water according to package directions. Drain, but reserve 1 cup of the cooking liquid. Transfer the pasta to a large bowl. While the pasta cooks, cook the bacon in a large, heavy large skillet over high heat until crisp, about 5 minutes. Transfer the bacon to paper towels to drain.
2. Add the shallots to the skillet. Reduce the heat to medium and cook until they are golden brown, about 5 minutes.
3. Add the snap peas and cook, stirring constantly, until the pods are bright green and crisp-tender, about 1 minute.
4. Add the pea tendrils and petite peas, stirring just until tendrils wilt, about 1 minute. (By now the pasta should be done.)
5. Add the pea mixture, bacon and mint to the pasta. Drizzle in just enough cooking liquid to moisten pasta, if needed. Stir in the Parmesan.
6. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve at once, passing additional cheese alongside. Makes 4 to 6 servings

* Available at Market

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The history of the Pea as found in Alan Davidson's The Penguin Companion to Food

The pea is a legume that originated in W. Asia and has been a staple food since ancient times. There are three main kinds: the first of these, the familiar garden pea, *Pisum sativum ssp sativum*, is by far the most important. A secondary form, the field or grey pea, used to be distinguished as *P. arvense*, but is now classified as a variety of the above ssp. Third is the small, wild Mediterranean pea, *ssp elatius*, sometimes called the oasis or maquis pea.

The earliest trace of the garden pea is in the relics of Bronze Age settlements in Switzerland, c. 3000 BC.

It was apparently grown by both Greeks and Romans in the classical period, spread quickly through India, where it is still a popular vegetable, and reached China in the 7th century A.D. The Chinese gave it the name hu tou (foreign legume.)

Both garden and field peas were eaten dried, and sometimes husked and split. Dried peas were one of the principal foods of poorer people throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, especially in winter. They were cheap, filling, and a useful source of protein.

A sudden vogue for eating immature peas fresh, which was a novel procedure, reached a peak at the end of the 17th century. In 1696 Mme de Maintenon wrote from the court of Louis XIV: 'There are some ladies who, having supped, and supped well, take peas at home before going to bed, at the risk of an attack of indigestion. It's a fashion, a craze.' French peas were very expensive. Some of this glamour still attaches to the French *petits pois*, which are not a separate variety but ordinary peas harvested very young.

And just to break it down

Garden peas – must be shelled because of their tough outer skin, and the peas inside eaten raw or cooked

Garden peas, variety sugar peas (or sugar snaps here in NC) – these may be eaten shell and all

Snow peas – popular in Asian cooking also are eaten whole

Pea tendrils – often overlooked, these delicate greens are excellent as garnish, raw in salads or lightly sautéed.