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All about Peas

A type of legume, peas grow inside long, plump pods. As is the case with all types of legume, their sugars start to turn to starch as shortly after they're picked, so they are best eaten just-picked. Frozen peas are put on ice very soon after being picked (within three hours) and the flavour can be superior to that of fresh peas harvested a couple of days previously.

Benefits of eating peas

- Just one serving of freshly frozen garden peas and petits pois contains as much vitamin C as two large apples!
- Being freshly frozen, there's absolutely no preparation needed. Just add to your recipe or pop them straight into soups, casseroles or curries.
- There's no wastage. Garden peas or petit pois chosen for freezing are the pick of the bunch.

Some fun facts about peas!

- The Latin name for peas is *pisum sativum*.
- The first peas were frozen by Clarence Birdseye who invented the 'plate froster' to preserve foods in the 1920's.
- On average everyone in Britain eats nearly 9,000 peas per year.
- The world record for eating peas is held by Janet Harris of Sussex who, in 1984, ate 7175 peas one by one in 60 minutes using chopsticks!
- Thick London fogs of the 19th and 20th centuries were dubbed 'pea-soupers' because of their density and green tinge.
- There are 35,000 hectares of peas grown in the UK each year, equivalent to about 70,000 football pitches. This produces about 160,000 tonnes of frozen peas - that's 2 billion 80 gram portions.

Pea, Mint and Feta Quinoa Fritters

(serves 12-15)



Ingredients

For the fritters

75g quinoa (weight when uncooked), cooked and drained

150g feta cheese

a handful of grated parmesan (optional)

200g frozen peas (sweet petit pois are best), cooked

2 spring onions, chopped finely (optional)

zest of 1 lemon

a couple of handfuls (about 3 heaped table-spoons) each of fresh parsley and mint

1 egg, lightly whisked

2 level tablespoons cornflour

salt & pepper to taste

about ⅓ cup oil of your choice for frying

To serve

Greek yoghurt & green salad (optional)

Method

1. Mix all the ingredients (apart from the oil) together in a big bowl. With wet hands, scoop up small handfuls of mixture and shape into 12 to 15 round and flattened fritters.
2. Heat up the oil on a medium heat, then fry the fritters (in 2 batches if necessary) for about 3 to 5 minutes on each side or until nice and golden and crispy.
3. Drain on kitchen paper, then serve while still hot and crispy, with the Greek yoghurt and green leaves if you like.



All about Asparagus

We wanted to share some fun facts about this sweet-stemmed springtime vegetable, you will be able to gain more knowledge on Asparagus from around your site, why not ask a member of the team if any salads or main courses are due to be placed on the menu!

1. Asparagus first came to Britain with the Romans. It thrives as a wild plant, and with its high tolerance of sandy, salty soil it will grow along riverbanks, shores of lakes, and coastlines, leading to much argument as to where it actually originated.
2. White asparagus is grown by creating mounds of soil around the growing spears, hiding them from the light and resulting in their blanched, pale look. It is particularly labour-intensive to harvest, as experienced eyes are needed to spot the spear tips in the soil.
3. Asparagus also comes in shades of purple and red, which turn green only when cooked.
4. Sizes range from slender, young 'sprue' asparagus to thicker-stemmed, jumbo-sized 'kitchen' grades.
5. It takes about three years for asparagus plants to become established, and even longer to reach a fully productive state.
6. In the UK, asparagus is traditionally grown in the Vale of Evesham in Worcestershire, and East Anglia.
7. Asparagus is considered a difficult food to pair with wine - it contains methyl mercaptan, a sulphur compound, which tends to give wine a vegetal or metallic taste. Try pairing asparagus with cool-climate wines that have pronounced herbal flavours to counteract this.
8. Top accompaniments for asparagus are butter, parmesan, hollandaise and vinaigrette, eggs, bacon or pancetta.

Chicken Fricassée with New Potatoes and Asparagus (serves 6)



Ingredients

- 1 tbsp groundnut oil
- 4 lean smoked back bacon rashers, chopped and rind removed
- 6 skinless chicken breast fillets
- 700g new potato, thickly sliced
- 250g asparagus spear, trimmed and diagonally sliced (keep tips whole)
- 225ml dry fruity cider (or ½ a can)
- 1 tbsp cornflour, blended with a little water
- 250ml carton Soya Dream
- 2 tbsp chopped flatleaf parsley

Method

1. Heat the oil in a large frying pan, then fry the bacon for 5 mins on a medium heat until golden. Remove with a slotted spoon and set aside. Add the chicken to the pan, then lightly fry for 4-5 mins to brown on both sides (you may need to brown the chicken in two batches if your pan is not large enough).
2. Meanwhile, cook the potatoes in a pan of salted boiling water for 10 mins or until tender. Cook the asparagus in a steamer over the potatoes for 6-8 mins or microwave in a covered dish with 2 tbsp water for 4-5 mins.
3. Pour the cider over the chicken, bring to the boil then reduce heat. Put the bacon back in the pan and simmer for 10-15 mins until the chicken is cooked through. Stir in the cornflour paste until lightly thickened, then add the Soya Dream and season. Stir in the drained vegetables and sprinkle with chopped parsley before serving



All about Spinach

Spinach is believed to be of Persian origin. By the 12th century, it spread across Europe and became known for good health; a reputation that stands firm today. The name Florentine is often used to describe dishes containing spinach (and a creamy sauce). It is thought the name dates back to the 16th century and the Italian wife of France's Henry II; Catherine de Medici. The unverified tale states that Catherine introduced spinach to the Court of France and to honour her Italian heritage, she called any dish containing spinach Florentine.

Spinach belongs to the chenopodiaceae family (also known as goosefoot), a family of nutritional powerhouses including beets, chard and quinoa. It shares a similar taste profile with these two other vegetables; the bitterness of beet greens and the slightly salty flavour of chard. There are three different types of spinach generally available: savoy, semi-savoy and smooth leaf.

The popeye effect

There is much lore regarding spinach, most famously as the source of Popeye's strength. When faced with the sight of trouble, pipe-smoking sailor-man Popeye would burst open a tin of spinach. Once consumed, his biceps would bulge and his new found strength would see him overcome his enemies. Although there is definitely lots of goodness in those leaves, the legendary statue Popeye bestowed on it is slightly inflated.

Nutritional Information

Spinach is available all year round but is in season during the spring (March - June). It is well known for its nutritional qualities and has always been regarded as a plant with remarkable abilities to restore energy, increase vitality and improve the quality of the blood. Spinach is also an excellent source of vitamin K, vitamin A, vitamin C and folic acid as well as being a good source of manganese, magnesium, iron and vitamin B2. Vitamin K is important for maintaining bone health and it is difficult to find vegetables richer in vitamin K than spinach. Others include kale, broccoli and green cabbage.

Spinach and Lemon baguette

(serves 4 as a snack)

Ingredients

- 1 large crusty baguette
- 200g baby spinach
- 200ml double cream
- 2 medium free-range eggs, beaten
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- Finely grated zest 1 large lemon
- 1 tsp English mustard
- 75g gruyère cheese, finely grated

Method

1. Heat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/gas
4. Halve the baguette widthways, then cut out an oval shape along the length of each half, leaving a good 3-5cm border around the edge – you want the shell to be as watertight as possible. Using your hands, pull out the soft bread inside.
2. Boil a full kettle of water and put the spinach in a large sieve or colander. Pour over the water and leave the spinach to wilt. Drain well, then set aside to cool.
3. In a medium bowl, mix the double cream with the eggs, garlic, lemon zest and mustard. Squeeze any excess water from the wilted spinach and put on a chopping board. Roughly chop, then stir into the cream mixture along with half the cheese. Season well.
4. Spoon the filling into each baguette half and sprinkle over the remaining cheese. Bake for 30-35 minutes until the filling has just set. Leave the baguettes to sit for a few minutes before serving, or serve completely cold.



Diary Dates

British Sandwich Week **8th - 14th May**

British Sandwich Week is a week-long celebration of the greatest food on the go and quite possibly the most iconic British culinary invention, the Sandwich.

The great British sandwich is such a central item in our psyche and culture that we have more different names for it than Eskimos do for snow! From Sarnies, butties and barmos to baps, baguettes and sangas, everywhere you go there's a local term for this icon.

Ever since John Montague, the 4th Earl of Sandwich ordered cold beef between slices of toast, to avoid getting up from his cards game, his name has become synonymous with the delectable dish.

Of course, meat and bread were staples long before he tucked into while playing cards, but he gave rise to the concept of having one as a convenient meal while getting on with other things!

Real Bread Week **14th - 22nd May**

Launched by the Real Bread Campaign in 2009, this is the annual, celebration of Real Bread and its makers.

One of the main aims of Real Bread Week has always been to encourage more people to bake it at home. Not only is this great fun, but it's a way helping to avoid all of the artificial additives that turn up in industrial loaves.

National Vegetarian Week **16th - 22nd May**

Can you live without meat for a week? Why not give

it a try for National Vegetarian week. There will be a host of events across the country promoting a meat-free lifestyle, so forget that bacon sandwich and get your chops around some exciting meat free dishes.