

The Power of Peas

By Sara Cabot of Little Lettice (www.littlelettice.com)

Early spring is a funny time for produce. The stored winter apples, squashes, and root vegetables are over and we find ourselves waiting impatiently for the first fruits and vegetables of summer.

In this 'betwixt and between' time, frozen fruits and veggies are always an option. They are easy to store and use; they are picked and frozen at source so are sometimes actually fresher than 'fresh' produce which may have sat around in a warehouse for weeks; they are reasonably priced too.

Frozen peas are a great vegetable to give to your kids as they are nutritionally dense (some people call them a 'super food'), and children tend to like them as they are sweet and fun to play with. Green peas are also bursting with nutrients too as they provide good amounts of 8 vitamins, 7 minerals, dietary fiber and protein.

Peas for Babies

Peas are one of the first vegetables you can give to your baby when s/he starts eating solids at 6 months. Simply steam or boil a few tablespoons of frozen peas, drain (reserving the cooking water), and puree in a Cuisinart or food mill. Add some of the cooking water if the mixture seems too thick.

Peas for Toddlers (& the rest of the family!)

Around 2 years old, kids tend to get fussier about what they eat, especially green vegetables. If your toddler likes smooth textures with the occasional dip, then peas can make a lovely healthy soup that the whole family can enjoy.

Pea Soup

Makes 1 adult portion, 2 kids' portions

1 tbsp butter
½ onion peeled and chopped
2 cups water
1 cup frozen peas
½ cup milk
salt and pepper

1. Melt butter and gently fry onion over low heat in a saucepan until soft
2. Add water to butter/onion and bring it to a boil
3. Add peas and simmer for 3 to 4 minutes until tender
4. Pour mixture into a blender and blend until smooth
5. Return to pan, add milk, and season with salt and pepper to taste (some chopped mint also adds a nice twist). Serve with strips of toast for dipping!

If your toddler is a finger food fiend, then a pea risotto is interesting to look at, healthy, and easy to assemble.

Pea Risotto

Makes 1 adult portion, 2 kids' portions

1 tbsp olive oil
½ onion peeled and chopped
1 garlic clove, peeled and crushed
1 1/2 cups Arborio or other risotto rice
about 2 cups of vegetable stock
1 cup frozen peas
2 tbsp freshly grated Parmesan cheese

1. Heat olive oil and gently fry onion and garlic until soft
2. Add rice and sauté until shiny with the oil
3. Add 1/3 stock and stir until absorbed
4. Continue to add stock, bit by bit and stirring until used up
5. Add peas and cook for another 5 minutes or so
6. Add Parmesan and stir so rice is creamy with just a little 'bite' (i.e., firmness).

For greater color interest, try frozen mixed vegetables such as sweet corn and carrots as well as peas.