



Craig Lee / Special to The Chronicle; styled by Julia Mitchell

## Peas

It is prime time for peas, including English or garden peas, which require shelling. Besides their wonderful flavor, English peas are one of the better sources of fresh vegetable protein, with 100 calories, more protein than a tablespoon of peanut butter and less than 0.5 grams of fat per  $\frac{3}{4}$ -cup serving.

This season has had a slow start because of the rain. "Since start of the season in mid-March, we were only able to pick five boxes at a time," says Mike Iacopi of Iacopi Farms in Half Moon Bay. "We may pick up to 200 boxes a day at peak season." Half Moon Bay has the perfect climate for peas. Iacopi Farms dedicates 60 acres — about 40 percent of its acreage — to the peas, with 22 to 25 staggered plantings each year.

**How to select:** Ideally, look for full, plump, even-size pods.

Large pods may yield more, but they usually turn starchy a few days after picking. The medium-size ones may stay sweet up to three weeks.

**How to prepare:** Shell peas just before cooking. Open pods and pop out peas. Boil, steam or microwave briefly, until just cooked.

**How to store:** Refrigerate unwashed peas in a plastic bag that allows some air circulation, then use as soon as possible. Shell just before cooking. Peas can be prepared ahead of time as long as they are quickly blanched, which stops the

## Cold Spring Garden Pea Salad

**Serves 6 to 8 as a side dish**

This is refreshing spring side dish to bring to a picnic. Just keep the dressing cold and add to the other ingredients just before serving. Fresh, sweet pea flavor will be good with poached or herb-roasted chicken, but might be overwhelmed by assertive dishes like barbecue. Or try it in a triumvirate with chicken salad and a green salad for a light luncheon dish.

**2 pounds fresh shelling peas, about 2 cups shelled**

**Kosher salt**

**$\frac{1}{2}$  cup finely diced red onion**

**1 cup diced jicama, cut about the same size as the peas**

**$\frac{1}{2}$  cup thinly sliced fennel bulb, roughly chopped (optional, see Note)**

**2 tablespoons finely sliced mint, or to taste**

**1 tablespoon finely chopped tarragon, or to taste (see Note)**

**3 to 4 tablespoons creme fraiche, yogurt or sour cream (see Note)**

**1 tablespoon lemon juice**

**1 teaspoon honey, or to taste**

**Black pepper to taste**

**1 to 2 red breakfast or other red-skinned radishes, thinly sliced crosswise, for garnish**

**Instructions:** Shell peas just before putting the salad together. Blanch peas briefly — about 30 seconds — in well-salted boiling water; if the peas are really fresh, you should check them about halfway through. Drain, then place in cold water to stop the cooking.

Drain cooled peas well, then add to

a medium-size bowl, along with the onion, jicama and fennel. Set aside a large pinch each of the mint and tarragon; add remainder to the salad.

In a separate bowl, whisk together the creme fraiche, lemon juice and honey, plus salt and pepper to taste. Fold dressing into vegetables and season to taste with salt and pepper. Garnish with reserved herbs and radishes.

**Note:** If thinly sliced, fennel's fresh crunch and mild anise flavor integrates well, so use a mandoline if possible. If you leave out the fennel, use more tarragon; it has a stronger anise flavor, so taste along as you add it.

**Per serving:** 124 calories, 6 g protein, 20 g carbohydrate, 3 g fat (2 g saturated), 5 mg cholesterol, 18 mg sodium, 7 g fiber.



**Wine pairing:** Cool and fresh, this easy to prepare dish deserves an equally fresh white wine. Complement this picnic dish with a Torrontes, Pinot Gris or Sauvignon Blanc like the 2008 Rodney Strong Vineyards Charlotte's Home Vineyard Sonoma County Sauvignon Blanc (\$15.00).

**XNIP code:** HYA7

**On menus:** In San Francisco, Palio D'Asti serves grilled line-caught swordfish with vignarola, a Roman vegetable dish that includes English peas, fava beans, small artichokes and green garlic. Nombe offers raw cherrystone

drills, sea beans and wakame seaweed served in a chilled sea broth. Osteria Stellina in Point Reyes features garganelli pasta with English peas, caramelized onions, bacon and Straus cream.

— Lynne Char Bennett