About – Peas are among the earliest-known vegetables with evidence pointing to cultivation in Burma and Thailand as early as 10,000 BC. Areas such as Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Egypt have produced archaeological evidence of peas dating back as early as 4800 BC and Afghanistan, Pakistan and India have evidence dating as far back as 2200 BC.

Peas are a cool season vegetable that does not tolerate intense summer heat. Spring and early summer are the peak season for peas. However, with the globalization of the Produce industry, we now can enjoy them virtually year round. Peas can be divided into three main varieties: English, Snow and Snap peas.

**English Peas:** Only about five percent of all English peas make their way to the Produce department as a fresh alternative to frozen or canned peas. English peas come in a plump, inedible pod each containing 4-6 edible peas. While they are available year round, their peak season is March to May and again August to November.

**Snow Peas:** Snow peas look quite different than English peas. The pod is flat and the “shadow” or the peas inside is visible through the pod. Unlike English peas, Snow peas are eaten pod and all. Fresh Snow peas are available all year long thanks to imports from countries such as Guatemala, Mexico, and Honduras.

**Snap Peas:** Also referred to as Sugar Snap peas, they are actually a hybrid of English peas and Snow peas. The look similar to English peas however they tend to be somewhat smaller in size. Like the Snow pea, Sugar Snap peas are eaten without being shelled. While they too are available year round, the spring and fall are prime time to enjoy these sweet legumes.

Today, California is the leading producer of peas in the United States. Washington, New York, Texas, Florida and New Jersey are also key peas-producing states.

Selection – When selecting English peas make sure they are plump, crisp and bright green in color. At the peak of maturity the pea pod will be full so check for empty space by listening for a rattling sound when you shake them. Snow peas should also be crisp but the color will be lighter than either the English pea or Sugar Snap. Preferably, Snow peas should be no more than three inches long and about 3/4 inch wide. Smaller Snow peas tend to be sweeter. Good quality Sugar Snap peas will be plump, crisp and bright green. Slightly smaller than Snow peas- about 2 1/2 to 3 inches in length is ideal.

Buy only what you will eat in a day or two as peas are not the hardiest of vegetables. Also, their sugar starts to convert back into starch as soon as they are picked. You should avoid pods that are either very large or very small or pods that show any indication of decay.

Storage - Unwashed peas can be stored in a plastic bag in the refrigerator but only for a relatively short period of time. English peas should never be shelled until just prior to use and it is best if they are stored for no more than two days. Snow peas and Sugar Snap peas will last for perhaps up to four days in the refrigerator. Remember, the sooner you use them the sweeter they will be. Fresh shelled English peas, Snow peas and Snap peas can also be blanched for one to two minutes and then frozen for later use.

Preparation and Uses –

**English Peas:** Wash the peas under running water before you remove the pod. Snap off the stem end of the pod and then press the seam with your thumb until it pops open. Run your thumb down the length of the pod to pop out the peas. Discard the pod. English peas can be steamed and plated as a vegetable or once cooked they can be chilled and used in a variety of salads including fresh garden salads.

**Snow Peas:** It is not necessary to remove the pod; however, you will want to snap off each end then rinse them under running water. A traditional use, of course, is in stir-fries but they also can be blanched for about a minute then immediately rinsed in cold water for use in garden salads. Blanching will bring out their emerald green color.

**Sugar Snap Peas:** Sugar Snap peas can be eaten raw; however, blanching brings out the color and sweetness. They too can be used in stir-fries or in salads. They are also finding their way onto vegetable platters as they go very well with a variety of dips.

Nutrition – Peas are an excellent source of nutrition. They are high in vitamins C and K and contain a significant amount of dietary fiber, thiamin and folate. Peas are a good source of vitamin A, potassium, magnesium, protein and several B vitamins. They are low in calories and contain no cholesterol.

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