

Extension

Seasonal Eating Whitney Danhof, Extension Agent

Earth's Bounty of Spring Vegetables
April 2013

The earth is springing back to life and the warmer weather is bringing the start of a bountiful harvest. I love the spring produce and all of the fresh new flavors after a winter of preserved foods and root vegetables. The strawberries, asparagus, leaf lettuces, escarole, spinach, spring onions, radishes, baby beets, baby bok choy, napa cabbage, broccoli rabe, collards and kale all turn into beautiful, flavorful dishes for a new season.

Try the Chinese cabbages for a different spring dish. Bok choy (pak choy, bok choy or pak choy) has elongated dark green leaves with a white or light green stem. In the spring, look for the baby version at the farmers' markets. It's most common use is in stir fries, either with garlic and ginger and



a drizzle of sesame oil at the end or as a part of a main dish stir fry with meat. But don't overlook this great choice for adding raw to salads. The Chinese napa cabbage (elongated whitish head with crinkled leaves) makes a good salad when shredded and combined with ramen noodles and an Asian dressing.

One of the more common treasures of spring is the English peas. My father had a garden when I was young and I remember pulling the pods off the plant and popping out the fresh, raw peas to eat right in the garden. Fresh peas have a relatively short season, so when you see them, snatch them up and use raw in salads or cooked in a side dish. Otherwise, the frozen work well also. If you can find them, look for the pea shoots. These are the little leaves and tendrils of the pea plants and are great in a salad or as a garnish. They burst with pea flavor and are a good combination with carrots or dressed with a little lemon vinaigrette. I found them last year at the Rutherford County Farmers' Market when it opened in May. If you grow your own peas, don't miss this part of the whole pea experience.

The recipe below is a great side dish for grilled meats or poultry. It fancies up peas with country ham, mushrooms and pearl onions. You can use the fresh pearl onions but will have to take the skins off. Dip them in boiling water to make this job easier. I prefer to use the frozen pearl onions which are already peeled.

For more ideas on using seasonal produce, visit the Bedford County Extension website (<https://utextension.tennessee.edu/bedford>) and click on Seasonal Eating. The Seasonal Eating Cooking Demonstration on Earth's Bounty Brunch will be on Wednesday, April 17 at 12:00 noon at the Extension Office. Call the Office at 684-5971 to sign up and bring \$7.00 to class to cover the samples.

Country Ham Pea Medley

1/2 cup chopped country ham
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
4 ounces mushrooms, roughly chopped
1/2 cup frozen pearl onions
1 cup frozen green peas, thawed
Salt and black pepper to taste

In a medium skillet, sauté the ham in the oil for 1-2 minutes. Add the mushrooms and onions and sauté until the mushrooms are cooked down and the onions are slightly browned and heated through. Add the peas and season with a little salt and pepper. (If your peas are still frozen, add them a little earlier.) Cook until the peas are hot and serve immediately.