

Seasonal Eating
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Dried Peas Bring Winter Comfort
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My Dad has always been the soup maker in our family. He loves to make chili with the left over prime rib from Christmas dinner. In Florida, he makes gumbo with the fresh shrimp. When I was growing up, I remember Potato and Leek Soup and Split Pea Soup with Ham often on the menu.

So this last week I've been a little under the weather with a cold and that brought to mind split pea soup. Hearty, filling, comfort food at its best. The added bonus is that it is easy to make. Dad always made his with ham hocks but I had Kielbasa sausage on hand which that gives the soup great flavor also. You could use smoked sausage too. The sausage is cooked first to release the fat and then removed so it doesn't get rubbery while the peas cook. If you use ham hocks they will cook with the peas and liquid.



The other point of controversy with pea soup is to puree or not puree. My grandmother served her pea soup as peas and vegetables in a broth. My Dad always blended his into a smooth, luscious puree like the texture of tomato soup. So I pureed mine in the blender. Be careful when using a blender with hot liquids. I only filled the blender about a quarter full and placed a towel over the lid as I started on the very lowest setting. Steam can build up and blow off the lid otherwise. You can adjust the texture of the soup with some water if it's too thick.

Since I was going to puree my soup, I didn't pre-soak the peas and didn't worry if they broke apart. If you aren't going to puree, then I would bring the peas and broth to a boil, turn off the burner and soak for an hour before simmering to help keep the shape of the peas.

This winter, break out the dried beans and peas for delicious and nutritious soups filled with fiber and nutrients.

Visit the Bedford County Extension website for more recipes and information about seasonal eating (bedford.tennessee.edu).

Split Pea Soup with Kielbasa

14 ounces kielbasa sausage, sliced

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1/2 large onion, chopped

1 carrot, sliced

2 ribs celery, sliced

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

2 bay leaves

1 pound dried split peas, sorted and rinsed

6 cups chicken broth

In a Dutch oven, sauté sausage slices in oil until browned. Remove to a bowl with a slotted spoon and refrigerate. Add onion, carrot, celery, pepper and salt to the fat in the pot and sauté until onions are translucent and softened. Add bay leaves, peas and broth and bring to a boil. Reduce to a simmer, cover and cook for about 2 hours, until peas are very tender. Remove the bay leaves. In small batches, puree the soup in the blender, or use a stick blender, until smooth. Thin with water, if necessary, and adjust seasoning. When ready to eat, add browned sausage and reheat.