THE STORY OF THE SPLIT PEA

As found out by your friend and co-resident George Plohn

My fellow residents, ladies and gentlemen: here is the story of the split pea, you always wanted to know about, but were afraid to ask… (I suppose…)

It is all about the split pea soup served with weekly precision, care of the one and only Bob, our taciturn Chef; yes that soup so ambiguously named as split pea soup, a soup that, I must admit, is quite yummy. But why, oh why, the poor pea needs to be split every time? This nagging question was and is bothering me day and night since more than 4 years, as a curious resident at Esplanade.

Why and more importantly by whom and in what manner is every single pea being split, oh Hamlet, THIS is the question!

It was my firm joking belief that the night before the soup is going to be served, the entire kitchen crew is summoned by order of management to be present in the deep recesses of the kitchen, each pea-operator being fitted with a special, extra sharp so-called "pea-splitting knife", specially manufactured in China, a ferocious looking tool invented by the original guillotine designer way back when, and then these good people sitting there in a circle in the dead of the night, while humming old Ghanaian songs in *sotto voce*, take each and every pea one by one and apply the needed deadly force to split the thing in two exactly matching halves; and they do this all night, without stopping for even a millisecond, cutting away in frenzy pea after pea until sunrise, by when at the sound of the rooster's call, all peas are split and ready to be made into soup, under the careful eyes of the aforementioned chef Bob.

But, Oh boy! or to be politically correct, also Oh girl!…how wrong I was!

Because the real story of the split pea is quite different.

So then, let me become now serious and go down to the needy-gritty meaning of the real split pea.

I am, therefore, putting on now my other hat, namely that of a more serious former chemist (…once a general, you always a general, right?) and present to you my dissertation.

How are split peas made?

Peas, although they belong to the same family as beans and lentils, are usually distinguished as a separate group because of the way they are prepared. The different types of peas are all spherical, a feature that also sets them apart from beans and lentils. Dried peas are produced by harvesting the peapods when they are fully mature and then drying them. Once they are dried and the skins removed, **they split naturally**.

When fresh peas are not available or when you want to enjoy a starchier, hardier flavored legume, dried peas are the perfect choice; they are available any time of the year.

Health Benefits

Dried peas, a small but nutritionally mighty member of the legume family, are a very good source of cholesterol-lowering fiber. Not only can dried peas help lower cholesterol, they are also of special benefit in managing blood-sugar disorders, since their high fiber content prevents blood sugar levels from rising rapidly after a meal.

Fiber is far from all that dried peas have to offer. Dried peas also provide good to excellent amounts of five important minerals, three B-vitamins, and protein—all with virtually no fat. As if this weren't enough,

dried peas also feature isoflavones, nutrients that can act like weak estrogens in the body and whose dietary consumption has been linked to a reduced risk of certain health conditions, including breast and prostate cancer.

Dried peas, like other legumes, are rich in soluble fiber. Soluble fiber forms a gel-like substance in the digestive tract that binds bile (which contains cholesterol) and carries it out of the body. Research studies have shown that insoluble fiber not only helps to increase stool bulk and prevent constipation, but also helps prevent digestive disorders like irritable bowel syndrome and diverticulosis.

In addition to its beneficial effects on the digestive system and the heart, soluble fiber helps stabilize blood sugar levels. If you have insulin resistance, hypoglycemia or diabetes, legumes like dried peas can really help you balance blood sugar levels while providing steady, slow-burning energy.

In addition to their stellar fiber content, dried peas also feature other heart healthy nutrients. They are good source of potassium, which may decrease the growth and development of blood vessel plaques and is also good for lowering high blood pressure.

History

The modern-day garden pea, from which dried peas are made, is thought to have originated from the field pea that was native to central Asia and Europe. Dried peas have been consumed since prehistoric times with fossilized remains being found at archeological sites in Swiss lake villages. Peas are mentioned in the Bible and were prized by the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Greece and Rome. For millennia, dried peas were the main way that people consumed this legume. It was not until the 16th century when cultivation techniques created more tender varieties of garden peas that people began to consume peas in their fresh state as opposed to just eating dried peas. It seems that the Chinese, a culture that had consumed this legume as far back as 2,000 BC, were the first ones to consume both the seeds and the pods as a vegetable. Peas were

introduced into United States soon after the colonists first settled in this country.

Split peas were also used for an unusual non-culinary purpose during the Second World War. Great efforts were made to optimize the manufacture of the British Supermarine Spitfire fighter aircraft, speeding up and making cheaper the manufacture while maintaining or enhancing performance. Flush-headed rivets were used on a prototype for the smoothest possible surfaces, but this made it more difficult, expensive, and slower to produce than using the usual dome-headed rivets. Rather than the cumbersome alternative, split peas were glued over all the flush rivets to simulate dome heads. This reduced the speed by 22 mph, which was unacceptable. Split peas were then progressively removed to determine which rivets really needed to be flush; the results were then applied to the manufacturing process. Sounds odd, but this is what they did.

Now, having said that, where is my split pea soup?