



Pulse Rate

Pulses and legumes are the workhorse ingredients of the kitchen.

By Rob Benes

Pulses and legumes get a bad—and undeserved—rap. The misconception about them is that each fresh or dried bean has its limits and uses. For example, garbanzo beans are only good for making hummus and white beans are for chili.

“Beans and peas are versatile ingredients that can be an addition to any composed dish,” says Kelly Franz, executive chef at Magnolias in Charleston, South Carolina. “And they can encompass any kind of flavor.”

Pulses and legumes also can meet customer desire for healthier menu choices. “They’re the perfect protein substitute for people who don’t eat meat, as well as a substitute for starches,” Franz says.

Pulses and legumes—a class of vegetables that includes dried and fresh beans, peas and lentils—are among the most versatile and nutritious foods available. They’re typically low in fat, contain no cholesterol and are high in folate, potassium, iron and magnesium. They also contain beneficial fats and soluble and insoluble fiber.



“Including these ingredients in menu development can expand menu creation, increase patronage, lower food costs and grow check averages,” says Jeff Finan, head chef at The Green Well gastro pub in Rockford, Michigan.

Peas and Beans

Franz uses green peas, butter beans, black-eyed peas and crowder peas (field peas) year-round. A local purveyor sells them fresh in season and frozen out of season. “I prefer fresh, but honestly, I can’t tell a huge difference in flavor and texture between fresh and frozen,” she says. “When it comes to canned items there could be a flavor difference, depending if a liquid is added during the canning process, as well as any flavor enhancer.”

The biggest benefit of using fresh items is that they’re in an unadulterated state, so they can be cooked as short or as long as needed to achieve different textures. “Using canned items tends to start with something that’s already soft,” Franz says. “So cooking them for long periods of time would result in mush.”

She prepares fresh black-eyed peas three ways. The first is in a cucumber salad that features the peas as a crouton. They’re cooked al dente in stock, Texas Pete hot sauce and salt to achieve a crunch, which takes about 20 minutes. Hoppin’ John risotto has peas cooked with ham hocks, bacon fat and Texas Pete until soft, and then mixed with toasted arborio rice cooked in the traditional risotto method, which takes about 40 minutes. The final application is sorghum barbecue black-eyed peas, boiled al dente, oven-baked until soft and combined with smoky mesquite sorghum barbecue sauce, which takes 90 minutes.

Fresh beans are only in season for a short time and can be sourced in or out of the pod. For example, garbanzo beans are available late spring through summer, lima beans July through October, shelling beans August through October and fava beans March through July. “The issue with using fresh items in the pod is the labor required to remove the bean,” Franz says.

OPPOSITE: Grilled chicken breast with white bean/caramelized onion spread over field greens and topped with panko crumbs and red pepper coulis provides a range of textures and flavors. **ABOVE:** Marinated and grilled octopus tentacles with bloomed and cooked Italian cannellini beans, pepper, arugula salad on Italian-style hearth bread.