



**THE HUEVOS RANCHEROS AT MAGNOLIAS, IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA, FEATURES COWPEAS THAT HAVE BEEN PURÉED WITH BUTTER, SALT, AND CUMIN, THEN COOKED AGAIN TO MIMIC REFRIED BEANS.**

## Fresh from the Pod

Seasonal shelling beans and legumes steal the side show. **By Amelia Levin**

**F**rom purple and white tie-dyed cranberry beans to bright green garbanzos and creamy cannellini, fresh shelling beans and peas signal the start of summer for chefs from coast to coast.

Crunchy when blanched and creamier when cooked, these colorful beans bring as much life to farmers' market stands as they do to salads and soups, pasta dishes, and more. However, they can be difficult to locate. Fresh shelling beans can be hard to obtain through traditional distribution methods, so they're often sourced from local farmers and gardeners.

Preparation can also be a bit tricky. Shelling beans can have a bitter pod,

thus requiring shucking or hulling. In some cases they can be quickly blanched or shaved super thin for crunchy salads. If you're lucky, you might find some of the larger, more prolific bean growers who offer shucked beans and peas. But, if self-shucking is necessary, some argue the unique pop of color, texture, and taste makes the task worthwhile and these seasonal gems a true labor of love. Here's a look at some lesser-known local and seasonal favorites from chefs.

### **Purple Peas at Passerelle Bistro**

Summer's the season when Chef Teryi Youngblood of Passerelle Bistro in Greenville, South Carolina, sources purple hull

peas from local farmers who are often growing crops specifically for the restaurant. "These peas are similar to black-eyed peas, but more tender, and they pop when you bite into them," Chef Youngblood says.

She uses the peas in a variety of dishes, including a cassoulet with duck sausage and confit, and bacon—substituting the peas instead of traditional white beans. She lets the peas slow-simmer in the stock, wine, and tomato broth—along with the other ingredients—for about an hour. "We like to use purple hull peas for this South Carolina version of a traditional French dish because they are more local and fresher than white beans," Youngblood explains. Earlier in the season, she sources the shucked peas from coastal farmers because their peas tend to pop up first.

### **Green Garbanzos à la Chef Grant**

A Scotland native whose family had a large vegetable garden, Chef Cameron Grant of Osteria Langhe in Chicago grew up feasting on the rows of fresh peas early in the season. Sometimes in a sneaky way: "If I did something naughty, I would be sent to my room without dinner, so I would lay down in the garden and those peas would be my dinner," he says. "You would have to go through the pain of picking and shucking them, but you were rewarded with the freshness and sweet taste."

Now, Chef Grant enjoys all types of peas but has favored green garbanzo beans as a special treat—and he'll often have to shuck them himself, just like when he was a kid. It's a tedious but tasty task: "You have to crack open the pod with your thumb and you only get one bean per pod," he says. "They are a labor of love compared to English peas that have six to 10 peas in a pod, but they're worth it—they have a bright and refreshing taste."

Grant prefers to simply blanch the bright green-hued beans in boiling salted water for 20 to 30 seconds, and then shock them in ice water to preserve their vibrancy and color, plus make them more

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digestible. Because of how labor-intensive the preparation is, he uses the beans as a special touch rather than a staple, choosing to add them into housemade pasta dishes with seasonal vegetables tossed in a velvety chicken stock, butter, and fresh herb reduction and topped with a citrusy breadcrumb blend.

He's also re-created a traditional pasta e fagioli using the green garbanzos instead of cannellini beans—producing extra color and crunch. For another twist on the traditional, he will sometimes make a green garbanzo hummus with coriander and cumin.

### **The South Loves its Cowpeas**

The family of cowpeas includes Southern staples like field peas and black-eyed peas. Executive Chef Kelly Franz of Magnolias in Charleston, South Carolina, uses many types of fresh shelling beans and peas because of their preva-

lence in the South. In fact, a few local distributors will do all the shucking for her, selling just the fresh beans in 10-pound, bulk bags.

Franz has developed a strong affinity for using crowder—or field—peas, which get their name from the way the peas crowd themselves in the pod. The peas are similar to black-eyed peas, but slightly richer, heartier, and denser, so they stand up well in a variety of dishes. “We precook the peas in water, salt, and a touch of hot sauce until soft, just like we do with our local butter beans,” she says.

Chef Franz uses the peas for a succotash—with red onion, bell peppers, celery, sweet corn, and pearl hominy—that serves as the bed for a buttermilk-and-bourbon-marinated catfish, lightly breaded and fried. The succotash is also a popular pairing with crab cakes.

For a take on huevos rancheros, she purées the cooked peas with butter, salt,

and cumin, cooking them again to mimic refried beans and then pairing it with braised beef short ribs, over-easy eggs, pico de gallo, a tobacco rémoulade, and flatbread crackers instead of tortillas.

Because of their lighter texture, Franz uses the fresh black-eyed peas in a twist on the classic Southern favorite Hoppin’ John, a traditional black-eyed pea and rice dish. “We cook the peas ahead of time, in chicken stock with ham hock, salt, and hot sauce, for about 45 minutes. And then make a risotto with arborio rice using that liquid, but pulling out the ham hock and leaving some chunks behind,” Chef Franz says.

### **Choosing Beans with Color and Crunch**

Chef Chris Davies at Homestead On The Roof in Chicago prefers to serve purple and white-hued cranberry beans raw because they can turn brown when

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**PASSERELLE BISTRO USES PURPLE HULL PEAS IN A CASSOULET WITH DUCK CONFIT.**

PASSERELLE BISTRO

blanched. “I shave them very thin in salads or split the pod, blanch the beans, and put them back in the pod to maintain some of their nice purple color and presentation,” he says.

For a vegan dish reflective of the chef’s Egyptian background, Chef Davies will pair smoked, cooked freekeh, an ancient grain, with a combination of roasted and pickled seasonal vegetables, garnishing the porridge-like dish with the thinly shaved raw cranberry beans for added color, crunch, and a dose of umami grassiness.

Dragon tongue beans, or wax beans, are typically grown by heirloom farmers and have a vein-like, interlacing purple and white-colored pod similar to cranberry beans. They are naturally sweeter and slightly more tender when blanched, shocked, and cut on a bias. On Homestead’s menu they are tossed with butter to make a pretty and pow-

erful statement for salads, pasta dishes, and other entrées—like smoked duck breast with smoked confit, huckleberry aigre-doux, and black rice polenta.

In Denver, Chef Jennifer Jasinski of Rioja, Bistro Vendôme, Euclid Hall Bar + Kitchen, and the recently opened Stoic & Genuine, grows her own cannellini beans for a special addition to seasonal dishes.

“I try to pick them fresh, before they start to dry out on the vine, shuck them, and cook them for about 10 to 12 minutes in simmering water,” she says. “They start off as white-green in color and are ready when they turn more yellow.” Chef Jasinski pairs the creamy bean with Colorado lamb dishes or adds them to summer vegetable ragouts with eggplant, tomato, spiced garlic, saffron, olive oil, and lemon juice—a side that often forms the base for a fresh fish entrée. ■