

Fruit and Veggie of the Month

Dry Beans and Peas



Dry beans and peas are an inexpensive food that can boost the nutritional content of meals. Dry beans and peas are very versatile, too. Whether served as a vegetarian option, or served with meats, poultry, fish and cheese, beans complement the meal.

Dry beans and peas are mature forms of legumes, or plants which have pods with rows of seeds inside. Some popular varieties include pinto beans, kidney beans, black beans, lentils, split peas, and garbanzo beans (chickpeas). Only a few types, such as green beans, string beans, baby green lima beans, and fresh soybeans (edamame) are not considered dry beans.



Dry beans and peas provide an excellent source of plant protein and fiber, magnesium, folate, iron, and zinc. Americans often do not get enough of these nutrients. Dry beans and peas are an excellent source of fiber which as a part of a healthy diet helps to lower the risk of heart disease. Dry beans and peas are naturally low in fat and sodium. They have no saturated fat or cholesterol. The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends eating three cups of beans or peas a week, based on a 2,000 calorie meal plan.

My Pyramid includes dry beans and peas in both the vegetable group and the meat and beans group. Beans and other legumes count as either a vegetable or as a meat alternate, but not both in the same meal.



Menu suggestions:

1. Add your favorite dried bean or pea, corn and salsa to your salad as a way to increase the fiber in your diet. This can be a wonderful southwestern salad.
2. Add black beans or fat free refried beans to an enchilada with low fat cheese and salsa.
3. Add dry beans or peas to your favorite soup.
4. Make chili more interesting by combining red beans, black beans, and pinto beans.

Plums



There are more than 140 varieties of plums sold in the United States. The plum is a drupe- a pitted fruit-related to the nectarine, peach, and apricot, but it is far more diverse than its relatives coming in a wider range of shapes, sizes, and especially skin colors. Its flavors also vary from extremely sweet to quite tart. Some plum varieties are specifically bred so that they can be dried and still retain their sweetness, and these are used for prunes. The domestic plum season extends from May through October.

Two medium plums contain 80 calories, 2 grams of protein, no fat, and 14 grams of carbohydrate. They also provide an excellent source of [vitamin C](#), as well as a good source of [vitamin K](#). Plums are also loaded with [antioxidant phytochemicals](#), such as anthocyanins, which help combat the oxidation - the rust, if you will - of our cells and protect against the negative effects of aging and DNA degradation. French scientists found that chlorogenic acid caused a decrease in anxiety-related behaviors in mice, possibly by combating the kind of oxidative stress that can also induce anxiety and depression in humans. Italian scientists have demonstrated that organically grown plums contain higher concentrations of the antioxidant vitamins A, C and E than conventionally grown versions. In fact, these smooth-skinned beauties earn a plum spot (black plums rank 16th and plums rank 19th) on the USDA's list of top twenty foods highest in [total antioxidant capacity](#), making Plums an [Antioxidant Superfood](#).

Plums should be plump and well colored for their variety. If a plum yields to gentle pressure, it is ready to eat, however you can buy plums that are fairly firm but not rock hard and let them soften at home. They will not increase in sweetness.

Plums are juiciest at room temperature, but always wash them before eating or cooking.

