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Pulse tradition continues in the 21st Century

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What do the history of human settlements and pulses have in common? Pulses, also known as dry peas, beans, lentils and chickpeas, were cultivated by humans in the earliest agriculture communities. Many cultures in the Near East, Mediterranean, Northern Europe, Africa and South America included this protein rich food in their diets. Evidence of peas and lentils dates back to 7000 BCE in modern day Turkey and Syria.

Our ancestors found pulses were an easy crop to cultivate along with grains such as wheat, barley, maize or sorghum. Pulses proved their worth, time and again, as a protein rich food that could be stored for months or years. It was the go-to food during famines and droughts and also in more densely populated areas that could not support livestock production.

Dry peas, beans, lentils and chickpeas offer an incredibly diverse choice for the 21st century family, just as they have for thousands of generations and cultures before us.

Western Canada is a leader in growing pulses with 60% of all pulse production being peas. Peas traditionally have been used in soups (France); mushy peas or pease pudding (Northern Europe or England); a dessert sweetened with figs (China) and as a dal (daal), a mainstay of meals in India and Pakistan.

For Canadians, pea soup is the most familiar way to cook split peas. But split peas also make tasty sautés. Try this Zucchini–Split Pea Sauté, an easy to make meal.

Zucchini and Yellow Split Pea Sauté

15 mL (1 tbsp) olive oil
2 green onions, chopped
2 medium zucchini, sliced
250 mL (1 cup) dried yellow split peas, prepared according to package
2 medium tomatoes, sliced
250 mL (1 cup) reduced-fat cheddar cheese, shredded
1 red onion, sliced in rings
Dash garlic powder
Dash light soy sauce
Dash pepper

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-low heat. Sauté green onions and zucchini slices until slightly tender, about 5 minutes. Add cooked yellow split peas. Stir gently. Layer tomato slices over top and sprinkle with 2/3 cup (150 mL) shredded cheese. Layer onion rings over mixture and add remaining cheese. Sprinkle garlic powder, soy sauce and pepper over top. Reduce heat to low, place lid on the pan and heat ingredients for about 5 minutes. Serve immediately.

Serves 6.

Quick cooking meal tip: Cook a large batch of peas and freeze in one or two cup servings for easy use in future meals.

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The Alberta Pulse Growers Commission represents 4,700 growers of dry peas, beans, lentils and chickpeas. Our vision is to have Alberta pulses recognized by consumers as environmentally friendly, healthy, nutritious, and recognized by all producers as being an essential element in a sustainable cropping system. To learn more about pulses in Alberta, please visit www.pulse.ab.ca