

IFAS Extension

What's So Lucky About Those Black-eyed Peas?

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Did you eat some black-eyed peas for luck on New Year's Day? You're not alone if you did, because many Americans, especially southerners make sure they eat black-eyed peas on New Year's Day.

After a little "informal" research, I discovered some folks associate peas with coins and greens represent cash. There are stories as far back as the day of Pharaoh when it was felt that eating this inexpensive and modest food would show humility to the heavens to make up for any vanity they might have. Other stories are told during Civil War times when black-eyed peas were once only fed to cows (called cowpeas). During a civil war battle black-eyed peas had to be eaten by a starving town cut off from supplies for over 40 days.

Do they actually bring luck? Well, I actually have some very sound research to support that black-eyed peas can be a very lucky addition to your diet.

Like most plant foods, black-eyed peas are low in sodium, and do not contain any saturated fat or cholesterol. They contain high amounts of potassium, phosphorus, calcium and carbohydrate. They are also a good source for protein, vitamin A, and fiber.

When black-eyed peas are combined with rice, known as "Hoppin' John", they make a complete protein, comparable with a serving of meat.

Black-eyed peas can be purchased dry, canned and/or frozen. Dried peas and beans are very economical, but need to be soaked before using. Sort through dry beans and discard any that are discolored or shriveled. Rinse well. Drain. Choose one of the following soaking options:

*Quick soak: Bring 1 cup of beans and 3 cups of water to a boil. Boil 2 minutes. Remove pan from heat and let stand 1 hour. Drain.

*Overnight soak: Soak beans overnight in a pan containing 3 cups of water for each cup of beans. (Beans and peas soaked by this method will keep their shape better and have uniform texture, and cook more quickly). Drain.

To cook, cover the soaked beans with fresh water. Add 1 tablespoon of oil or other fat to reduce foaming during cooking. Bring beans to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer until tender. Stir occasionally. Beans are done when they are fork tender. Most varieties take 1 1/2 - 2 hours to cook.

Store dried beans and peas in an airtight container. Store in a cool, dry area. Dried beans and peas may be stored up to two years.

One cup of dried beans or peas makes about 2 to 3 cups cooked. Two cups cooked beans equals 1 (16 oz.) can beans, drained. One pound of dried beans equals about 2 cups of dry beans.

Following is a recipe using black-eyed peas and dried northern beans:

Taco Soup

- 1 pound ground beef, if desired or 2 cups of rice
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 (1 ounce) package taco seasoning mix
- 1 (15 ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1 (15 ounce) can whole kernel corn, drained
- 2 cups cooked great northern beans (1 cup dry)
- 1 (15 ounce) can black-eyed peas, drained
- 3/4 cup water

Dry and cook northern beans before using in the recipe. In a large pot over medium heat, cook beef (optional) and onion until beef is brown; drain. Add taco seasoning, tomato sauce, water, rice (optional), corn and beans, Stir well and heat throughout, but do not boil. Makes 6 servings.