

# Jefferson-era Recipe: Peas

by **Anonymous** - March 28, 2011

Time for the April installment of our monthly series in which we post a recipe from *The Virginia House-wife*, a recipe book published in 1824 by Mary Randolph (<https://www.monticello.org/research-education/thomas-jefferson-encyclopedia/mary-randolph-physiognotrace/>), kinswoman to Thomas Jefferson. Leni Sorensen, our African American Research Historian and a culinary historian of national repute, has once again made this month's dish and here we include her notes and pictures.

PEAS

April 2011

First, the recipe from Mary Randolph:

To have them in perfection, they must be quite young, gathered early in the morning, kept in a cool place, and not shelled until they are to be dressed; put salt in the water, and when it boils, put in the peas; boil them quick twenty or thirty minutes, according to their age; just before they are taken up, add a little mint chopped very fine, drain all the water from the peas, put in a bit of butter, and serve them up quite hot. (Mary Randolph, *The Virginia House-Wife*, 1824; facsimile of first edition, Historical notes and commentaries by Karen Hess, University of South Carolina Press, 1984. pp. 127-8)

You'll notice that MR doesn't usually deal with quantities or servings. I believe that is because she knew that her readers, and their enslaved cooks, were well accustomed to 10-15-20 people sitting down for the dinner meal and the hostess had to vary amounts accordingly. Imagine being the woman or child shelling those many pounds of peas, probably beginning mid-morning so as to be ready to cook in time for dinner. In the Monticello kitchen, ruled over by Edith Fossett (<https://www.monticello.org/research-education/thomas-jefferson-encyclopedia/edith-hern-fossett/>), all the steps that had to be in place for the afternoon's dinner moved like clockwork. Peas, being a particular favorite

(<https://www.monticello.org/thomas-jefferson/brief-biography-of-jefferson/a-day-in-the-life-of-jefferson/attending-to-my-farm/peas-come-to-table/>). of Jefferson's, meant careful preparation for even so seemingly simple a dish.



([https://www.monticello.org/sites/default/files/legacy\\_files/uploaded-content-images/Peas1.JPG](https://www.monticello.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/uploaded-content-images/Peas1.JPG)).

Shelling fresh peas.



([https://www.monticello.org/sites/default/files/legacy\\_files/uploaded-content-images/Peas2.JPG](https://www.monticello.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/uploaded-content-images/Peas2.JPG)).

Peas in a pod

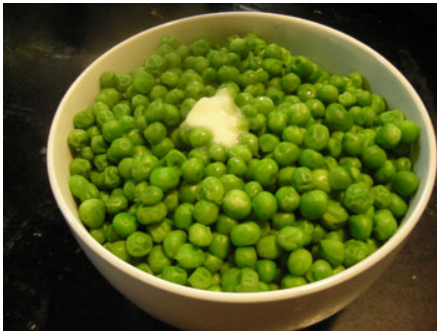


([https://www.monticello.org/sites/default/files/legacy\\_files/uploaded-content-images/Peas3.JPG](https://www.monticello.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/uploaded-content-images/Peas3.JPG)).

Peas cooking.

([https://www.monticello.org/sites/default/files/legacy\\_files/uploaded-content-images/Peas4.JPG](https://www.monticello.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/uploaded-content-images/Peas4.JPG)).

Peas ready to serve.



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