

pea and ham soup recipe slow cooker

Pea and ham soup recipe slow cooker is a comforting and hearty dish that warms both the body and soul. Perfect for chilly evenings or as a delightful meal prep option, this recipe combines the earthy flavors of split peas with the savory richness of ham. Utilizing a slow cooker not only simplifies the cooking process but also allows the flavors to meld beautifully over time, resulting in a soup that is both nourishing and satisfying. In this article, we will delve into the details of preparing pea and ham soup in a slow cooker, including ingredient recommendations, preparation steps, and tips for achieving the best flavor.

Understanding Split Peas and Their Benefits

Before we dive into the recipe, let's explore the star ingredient of our soup: split peas. These small, round legumes come in two primary varieties: green and yellow. Both types are interchangeable in this recipe, although they may impart slightly different colors and flavors.

Nutritional Benefits of Split Peas

Split peas are not only delicious but also packed with a range of nutrients:

1. **High in Protein:** They are an excellent plant-based protein source, making them a fantastic option for vegetarians and those looking to reduce meat consumption.
2. **Rich in Fiber:** Split peas are high in dietary fiber, which promotes digestive health and helps maintain a feeling of fullness.
3. **Low in Fat:** They are naturally low in fat, making them a healthier choice for soups and stews.
4. **Vitamins and Minerals:** Split peas provide essential vitamins and minerals, including iron, potassium, and folate.

Gathering Your Ingredients

To make a delicious pea and ham soup in a slow cooker, you will need the following ingredients:

Main Ingredients

- 2 cups split peas (green or yellow, rinsed and drained)
- 1 pound ham hock (or diced ham)
- 1 large onion (chopped)
- 2 carrots (diced)
- 2 celery stalks (diced)
- 3 cloves garlic (minced)
- 6 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme (or a few sprigs of fresh thyme)

- Salt and pepper (to taste)

Optional Ingredients

- 1 potato (peeled and diced, for added creaminess)
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika (for a smoky flavor)
- Fresh parsley (for garnish)
- Lemon wedges (for serving)

Preparing Your Pea and Ham Soup

The beauty of the slow cooker lies in its simplicity. Below, we outline the steps to prepare this delightful soup.

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. **Prepare the Vegetables:** Start by chopping the onion, carrots, celery, and garlic. If you choose to add a potato, peel and dice it as well.
2. **Combine Ingredients in the Slow Cooker:** In your slow cooker, layer the ingredients as follows:
 - Add the rinsed split peas.
 - Place the ham hock (or diced ham) on top.
 - Add the chopped onion, carrots, celery, and garlic.
 - Pour in the broth, ensuring that the peas are fully submerged.
 - Add the bay leaf, thyme, and any optional ingredients you prefer.
3. **Season to Taste:** Before covering the slow cooker, add salt and pepper to taste. Remember that the ham can be salty, so it's best to err on the side of caution with the salt initially.
4. **Cook the Soup:** Set your slow cooker to low for 6-8 hours or high for 3-4 hours. The soup is ready when the split peas are tender and the flavors have melded together.
5. **Shred the Ham:** Once cooked, carefully remove the ham hock from the soup. Let it cool slightly, then shred the meat off the bone and return it to the soup. Discard any excess fat and the bay leaf.
6. **Blend for Creaminess (Optional):** If you prefer a creamier texture, you can use an immersion blender to blend a portion of the soup. Alternatively, transfer a portion to a standard blender, blend until smooth, and return it to the slow cooker.
7. **Adjust Seasoning:** Taste the soup and adjust seasoning as necessary. You can add more salt, pepper, or even a squeeze of lemon juice for brightness.
8. **Serve:** Ladle the soup into bowls and garnish with fresh parsley. Serve with lemon wedges on the side for a refreshing twist.

Storing and Reheating Leftovers

Pea and ham soup can be stored easily, making it a wonderful meal prep option.

Storage Tips

- Refrigerator: Allow the soup to cool completely before transferring it to an airtight container. It can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 4-5 days.
- Freezer: For longer storage, ladle the soup into freezer-safe containers, leaving some space at the top for expansion. It can be frozen for up to 3 months.

Reheating Instructions

- Stovetop: Reheat on the stovetop over medium heat, stirring occasionally until warmed through.
- Microwave: Place a portion in a microwave-safe bowl, cover loosely, and microwave on high in 1-minute intervals until hot.

Variations to Try

While the classic pea and ham soup is delightful as is, consider experimenting with these variations:

1. Vegetarian Version: Substitute the ham hock with smoked paprika and mushrooms to impart a smoky flavor without meat.
2. Spicy Kick: Add red pepper flakes or diced jalapeños for a bit of heat.
3. Herb Infusion: Use fresh herbs like rosemary or cilantro for a different aromatic profile.
4. Creamy Version: Stir in a splash of heavy cream or coconut milk before serving for a richer texture.

Conclusion

The pea and ham soup recipe slow cooker is a timeless dish that encapsulates comfort and nutrition in a single bowl. Its simple preparation and the ability to customize the ingredients make it a versatile option for any home cook. Whether you enjoy it as a main dish or a hearty starter, this soup is sure to become a favorite in your household. With its robust flavors and satisfying texture, it's a dish that brings warmth during the cold months and is perfect for sharing with family and friends. So, gather your ingredients, set your slow cooker, and savor the delightful aroma as this comforting soup simmers away, ready to be enjoyed.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the key ingredients for a pea and ham soup recipe in a slow cooker?

The key ingredients include split peas, diced ham, onion, carrots, celery, garlic, vegetable or chicken broth, and seasonings like thyme and bay leaves.

How long should I cook pea and ham soup in a slow cooker?

You should cook pea and ham soup in a slow cooker for about 6 to 8 hours on low heat or 3 to 4 hours on high heat until the peas are tender.

Can I use dried peas for a slow cooker pea and ham soup?

Yes, dried split peas are ideal for this recipe. Just make sure to rinse them thoroughly before adding them to the slow cooker.

What can I add to enhance the flavor of my pea and ham soup?

You can enhance the flavor by adding smoked paprika, black pepper, or even a splash of Worcestershire sauce. Fresh herbs like parsley can also brighten the dish.

Is it possible to make pea and ham soup in a slow cooker without ham?

Yes, you can make a vegetarian version by omitting the ham and using vegetable broth. You can add extra vegetables or legumes for protein instead.

How do I store leftover pea and ham soup?

Store leftover pea and ham soup in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3-4 days, or freeze it for longer storage, up to 3 months.

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