

Ingredient

# BROAD BEANS

Sweet and tender in salads at the start of the season and – as they grow plumper – an earthy addition to soups nearer the end of summer, broad beans are the most versatile of legumes

Words and recipes by Tonia George. Photographs by Myles New

SETTING OFF FOR A SUMMER'S day walk on my mother's farm, you must first contend with a dangerous footpath that snakes through the centre of her kitchen garden. The risk is not that you might fall down a pothole, but that a head might pop up from behind a row of tangled poles, asking if you'd like to help her pick the beans – an offer that's impossible to refuse.

As a result, I've spent many an afternoon picking and podding, but as the carrier bags start to fill up, the realisation dawns: a kilogram of pods yields just 300g of beans. There are still hours of podding ahead before any chance of a walk.

I've read many whimsical articles on the joys of podding: writers recall afternoons listening to opera while easing off the soft, cottony lining of each and every pod. It seems it's enjoyable for some but I just can't relate to this. I want to get on with the cooking and the eating. And as if the initial work wasn't laborious enough, the little devils often demand double-podding. Any bean bigger than a thumbnail is tough and bitter, but when liberated from its dreary overcoat, its inner emerald kernel is a delight. I usually simmer them for two minutes and then refresh in cold water so a mere squeeze makes them jump out of their skins.

Broad beans have had unhappy associations for centuries. In *The Penguin Companion to Food*, Alan Davidson cites many examples, such as the tradition of serving them at wakes, and the fact that Pythagoras's followers were forbidden to eat them. Davidson suggests this may have had something to do with favism, a rare form of poisoning affecting those lacking the enzyme to digest the bean. Or maybe Pythagoras just had better things to do than double-pod a broad bean.

The upside to growing your own crop is that the hours of your life you lose to picking them can actually be clawed back by skipping the podding process altogether. To do this you need to pick them while they are no thicker than your index finger. Top, tail and string them, then chop into stubby lengths, and simmer with a glug of fruity olive oil and a cup of water for 20 minutes until moist. Stir in some chopped, balmy mint leaves and spoon the beans and their juices over some Greek yogurt streaked with a little crushed garlic. Toast a pile of wholemeal pitta bread and scoop the whole lot up.

Beans, like other legumes, deteriorate rapidly once picked. The sugars turn to starch and they lose their sweetness, becoming mealier and less tender by the day. Freshness is paramount. This is the real difference with home-grown beans. If you're choosing beans that aren't straight from the garden, flexibility can be a bad sign; beans you can bend often aren't worth eating. And bear in mind that ready-podded beans may have taken a while getting to the shelf – fine for soups and purées but not salads.

What really sets broad beans apart is that they change with the seasons. In early June, the first beans, sweetly tender, need

just five minutes in the pot, or 20 in their pods. By late July, they are plumper, longer and need podding – seven to ten minutes in the pan is about right. When August comes around, they need to fling off their jackets and by late summer, they are too mealy for salads and should be slowly cooked in a chunky minestrone, or braised in milk with sage and a head of garlic, as at The River Cafe. As for the pods, you can simmer these until tender and then put them through a mouli with a nut of butter for an earthy purée, or add to a ham-hock stock for a soup.

Old and young broad beans alike appreciate a bit of grassy extra virgin olive oil or salted butter and come alive with a splattering of chopped mint or parsley. Their sweet flavour lends itself well to all salted pork products: a few nuggets of crisp, fried bacon, chorizo or pancetta work wonders with cooked beans; young, raw beans prefer thin slices of Serrano ham. Crumbled chunks of milky Feta, creamy goat's cheese, Parmesan flakes and hot chunks of Halloumi all have something to offer too. Try spreading sourdough toast with buffalo Ricotta, then top with garlic- and basil-braised broad beans.

They freeze brilliantly, so if you want to store them, blanch for three minutes, plunge into icy water, bag up and store in the freezer for up to 12 months. Blanching them not only gets rid of bacteria, but also deactivates the enzymes that would otherwise destroy their nutrients and texture. Defrosted a season later, they will freshen up heartier offerings such as braised lamb shanks or spiced pilafs.

Broad beans are also good for you. They are a fine source of soluble fibre, which is good for cholesterol levels, and contain useful amounts of minerals. Picking and podding them will keep you fit as a fiddle too – even if a few long walks in the fields would probably keep you fitter.

ANY BROAD BEAN BIGGER THAN A THUMBNAIL IS TOUGH, BUT LIBERATED FROM ITS DREARY COAT, ITS INNER, EMERALD KERNEL IS A DELIGHT





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BYESSAR

This Moroccan dip is similar to houmous but made with broad beans. If you don't want to double-pod the beans, just cook them for 20 minutes with the skins left on, but be prepared for the flavour to be a little bitter. Toasted pitta is the obvious accompaniment, but the stronger flavour of sourdough bread offsets the sweetness even better.

SERVES 4
PREPARATION: 30 MINUTES
COOKING: 5 MINUTES

- 100ml Extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 1 tsp Ground cumin
- ¼ tsp Chilli powder, plus extra for dusting
- 300g Podded broad beans
- 1 Fat garlic clove, sliced
- 2 Oregano sprigs, leaves only
- 1 Lemon, juice
- 6 slices Sourdough bread, toasted and halved

Heat 2 tsp oil in a frying pan and add the cumin and chilli powder. Cook for 1 minute, then add the beans and garlic and 200ml water. Simmer for 5 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the beans to a blender; reserve the cooking liquid. Blend the beans with the oregano until roughly chopped, then, with the motor running, gradually add almost all the remaining olive oil. Thin the mixture down with 80–120ml cooking water to give it a dipping consistency.

Season and add lemon juice to taste. Drizzle with the remaining olive oil, dust with a pinch of chilli powder and serve with toasted sourdough bread.

PER SERVING: 274 KCALS/25.9G FAT/3.8G SATURATED FAT/TRACE SALT/1.2G SUGARS

The Corker recommends A juicy, generously flavoured country red such as Cahors makes a relaxed red-wine match for this bean dip and any further salad accompaniments you choose. **Cahors Pont de Diable 2005 Caves d'Olt, France. Bin 82326; £4.99.**

BABY BROAD BEANS WITH HAM AND SHERRY VINEGAR

Andalucian cuisine uses broad beans a lot, so it's no surprise that the smokiness of Spanish ham and the full-bodied flavour of sherry vinegar partner them well in this salad. Eat with plenty of crusty bread.

SERVES 4
PREPARATION: 10 MINUTES
COOKING: 20 MINUTES

- 3 tbsp Extra virgin olive oil
- 2 Red onions, thinly sliced
- 1 Garlic clove, crushed
- 3 tbsp Sherry vinegar
- 300g Podded baby broad beans
- 150g Soft goat's cheese
- 6 slices Serrano ham, cut into strips
- 2 tbsp Chopped flat-leaf parsley

Heat 2 tbsp oil in a frying pan and sauté the onions and garlic for 10 minutes over a low heat, covered with a lid, until soft. Add the sherry vinegar, broad beans and 100ml water and bring to the boil. Cook for 5 minutes with the lid on, then for a further 2 minutes uncovered until the water has almost all evaporated and the beans are tender. Tip onto a large platter and crumble over the goat's cheese; serve with the ham and scatter over the parsley.

PER SERVING: 334 KCALS/23.9G FAT/9.2G SATURATED FAT/1.8G SALT/5.5G SUGARS

The Corker recommends The flavours of this classic southern Spanish dish are made for a pungent Manzanilla such as this. **Hidalgo La Gitana Manzanilla Sherry, Spain. Bin 64030; £6.49 (4 June to 3 July; usually £7.49).**

HOT-SMOKED SALMON WITH BROAD BEANS, PRESERVED LEMONS AND ARTICHOKE HEARTS

This is a throw-it-all-together kind of salad that is perfect for a picnic or a sunny lunch in the garden. Double-podding is better as it keeps the dish fresher and more summery. However, you can get away without doing this if you're short on time.

SERVES 4
PREPARATION: 25 MINUTES
COOKING: 1–2 MINUTES

- 350g Podded broad beans
- 200g Artichoke hearts, drained and quartered
- 6 Salad onions, dark green ends discarded; white parts sliced
- 300g Hot-smoked salmon, skinned and broken into large chunks
- 4 tbsp Extra virgin olive oil
- 2 Lemons, juice of half, plus extra to serve
- 2 Small preserved lemons, rind only, finely chopped
- A handful Mint leaves
- 100g Wild rocket

Simmer the beans in a saucepan of boiling water for 1–2 minutes. Drain and run under cold water, then squeeze them out of their skins. Place in a mixing bowl with the artichoke hearts, salad onions and hot-smoked salmon.

Whisk together the olive oil, the lemon juice and the preserved lemon rind. Season with salt and black pepper. Pour this dressing over the beans, add the mint and rocket and toss well.

Divide the salad between plates and serve with slices of lemon.

PER SERVING: 414 KCALS/29.5G FAT/6.6G SATURATED FAT/1.8G SALT/3.1G SUGARS

The Corker recommends Vivacious and peppery, this rich salad provides a great opportunity for a showy Marlborough Sauvignon to turn on its pungent charm. **The Ned Sauvignon Blanc 2006 Waihopai River, Marlborough, New Zealand. Bin 12015; £9.99.**



PAPPARDELLE WITH BROAD BEANS AND GREEN CHILLI AND PECORINO PESTO

Basil pesto becomes fierce and pungent with the addition of green chillies. Pecorino is made with sheep's milk and has a creamy flavour – a perfect counterfoil to the punchy sauce.

SERVES 4
PREPARATION: 25 MINUTES
COOKING: 10 MINUTES

- PESTO
- 25g Pine nuts, toasted
  - 1 Small garlic clove
  - 2 Large green chillies, deseeded
  - 40g Basil leaves
  - 100ml Extra virgin olive oil
  - 50g Pecorino, grated, plus extra to serve

- 200g Podded broad beans
- 350g Pappardelle

First make the pesto. Toast the pine nuts in a dry frying pan or hot oven. Blitz the garlic, chillies and basil with a pinch of salt in a food processor or mash in a pestle and mortar. Add the pine nuts and whizz until coarsely chopped. Add 50ml oil and blend again, then add the remaining oil and the cheese and stir. Taste and season. Bring a large pan and a small pan of salted water to the boil. Add the beans to the smaller pot and simmer for 2–3 minutes until they start to rise to the surface. Drain and rinse them under cold water, then pop them out of their skins. Discard the outer layer. Add the pappardelle to the large pot and cook for 6 minutes or until al dente. Drain and tip into a large serving bowl. Toss 2 tbsp pesto into the hot pappardelle. Bring any pasta that is not coated up to the top and add another 2 tbsp pesto along with the broad beans. Toss well to combine. Serve with some shaved Pecorino.

PER SERVING: 618 KCALS/37.6G FAT/7.3G SATURATED FAT/0.4G SALT/2.9G SUGARS

The Corker recommends The chilli-powered pesto in this dish is best matched with a refreshing but easy-going white such as this blend of Verdicchio and Trebbiano. **Waitrose Italian Organic Bianco 2005 Italy. Bin 85791; £3.99 (4 June to 3 July; usually £4.99).**



