

Hearty Ham & Split Pea Soup with Potatoes



Eddie's note: In colder months, it is hard to beat a good bowl of soup to “warm your bones”. This soup recipe from America’s Test Kitchen fits the bill nicely. I usually start with leftover ham and bones from larger meals, but this recipe assumes you buy the ham just for this soup.

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS

After much testing we discovered that ham was indeed necessary for the best split pea soup recipe; broths made without ham tasted weak and those made with ham substitutions tasted processed. A ham bone was key to flavorful broth, and the tender pieces of ham that fell away from the bone during cooking were essential to the soup. But you don't have to buy a huge half ham for our split pea soup recipe; we found that a small, inexpensive picnic ham worked just fine. As for the vegetables, we found that while there's no need to soak the peas, but the other, fresh vegetables benefit from a deep caramelization on the stovetop.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 smoked bone-in picnic ham (about 2 1/2 pounds)
- 4 bay leaves
- 1 pound split peas (2 1/2 cups), rinsed and picked through
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 2 tablespoons [olive oil](#)
- 2 medium onions, chopped medium
- 2 medium carrots, chopped medium
- 2 medium stalks celery, chopped medium
- 1 tablespoon [unsalted butter](#)
- 2 medium cloves garlic, minced
- pinch granulated sugar
- 3 small new potatoes, scrubbed and cut into medium dice
- [Ground black pepper](#)
- minced red onion (optional)
- [balsamic vinegar](#)

INSTRUCTIONS

HEADNOTE

Use a small 2 1/2-pound smoked picnic portion ham if you can find one. Otherwise, buy a half-picnic ham and remove some meat, which you can save for use in sandwiches, salads, or omelets (see illustrations below). If you like caraway, see related recipe. The finished soup will continue to thicken as it stands but can be thinned with some water when reheated. To cut 45 minutes off the cooking time of the soup, simmer the ham 1 1/2 hours, then add the split peas to the pot. When the ham is tender, after about 45 minutes more of simmering, remove it and shred.

INSTRUCTIONS (SERVES 6)

1. Bring 3 quarts water, ham, and bay leaves to boil, covered, over medium-high heat in large soup kettle. Reduce heat to low and simmer until meat is tender and pulls away from bone, 2 to 2 1/2 hours. Remove ham meat and bone from broth; add split peas and thyme and simmer until peas are tender but not dissolved, about 45 minutes. Meanwhile, when ham is cool enough to handle, shred meat into bite-sized pieces (see illustration below) and set aside. Discard rind and bone.
2. While ham is simmering, heat oil in large skillet over high heat until shimmering. Add onions, carrots, and celery; sauté, stirring frequently, until most of the liquid evaporates and vegetables begin to brown, 5 to 6 minutes. Reduce heat to medium low; add butter, garlic, and sugar. Cook vegetables, stirring frequently, until deeply browned, 30 to 35 minutes; set aside.
3. Add sautéed vegetables, potatoes, and shredded ham to soup; simmer until potatoes are tender and peas dissolve and thicken soup to the consistency of light cream, about 20 minutes more. Season with ground black pepper. Ladle soup into bowls, sprinkle with red onion, if using, and serve, passing balsamic vinegar separately.