

Black-Eyed Pea and Kale Soup

by Joseph Erdos



New Year's would not be complete without the traditional foods that celebrate the start of a new year in a somewhat superstitious way. Many cultures eat foods that are symbolic of luck, progress, prosperity, and wealth. Ham and pork are often eaten because pigs root forward with their snouts. Stay away from chicken, because they scratch backward. Legumes double in size when cooked and thus represent prosperity. Lentils look like tiny coins. Leafy greens resemble paper money and symbolize wealth. Even if these food customs seem superstitious, they are rooted in culture, tradition, and history.

In the American South especially, black-eyed peas have a history that is important to remember. The legume has been grown in the South since Colonial times. It was originally domesticated thousands of years ago in Africa and arrived in America on slave ships. Black-eyed peas are a staple in soul food. Typical Southern New Year's foods include such dishes as black-eyed pea cakes and Hoppin' John, which is a combination of peas and rice with smoked pork. Boiled ham hocks and cooked greens, such as collard greens, mustard greens, or kale are also eaten. This simple soup holds true to tradition to include a bit of each symbolic food.

The recipe starts off with a stock made from flavorful ham hock. Peas, cooked in ham stock or water, along with kale are added toward the end of the cooking time. This ensures the beans are perfectly cooked, not mushy, and that the greens stay bright green, just like greenbacks. Not only is this meal symbolic of all of our hopes and wishes for the new year, but it's also very nutritious. Start the new year off right in every way that counts with a bowl of this "good luck" soup. Happy New Year!

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2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, chopped

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2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 large carrot, diced
2 ribs celery, diced
8 cups ham stock
1 bay leaf
4 cups cooked black-eyed peas
1 bunch kale, stems removed, torn into pieces
fine sea salt
freshly ground black pepper

Heat oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add onion and garlic; sauté until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add carrot and celery, sauté an additional 5 minutes. Add ham stock and bay leaf, cover, and simmer until vegetables are tender, about 20 to 25 minutes. Add black-eyed peas and kale. Continue to simmer until kale is wilted, about 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Remove bay leaf before serving.

Yield: 6 to 8 servings.

- *Recipe courtesy of Joseph Erdos*