

CHICKPEAS

Chickpeas, also called garbanzo beans or garbanzos, are one of the oldest cultivated vegetables known to man—having been grown and eaten as long as 7500 years ago. They have been found in Stone Age caves in southern France and Turkey, in the ruins of biblical Jericho, and were common in ancient Greece and Rome. There are two main types, a smaller darker chickpea grown mainly in Mexico, Iran, and India where it is known as chana dal, and a more common larger whitish variety, grown in southern Europe, north Africa, Chile and Afghanistan. Today, India, Pakistan and Turkey are the world's major producers of chickpeas.

Chickpeas can be cooked and eaten cold in salads, cooked in stews, ground into a flour, ground and shaped into balls and fried as *falafel*, stirred into a batter and baked, ground into a paste called *hummus*, roasted and spiced and eaten as a snack, or made into delicious curries. In the Philippines garbanzo beans in syrup are eaten as a sweet or dessert called *halo halo*. Chickpeas are also a popular ingredient in southern Italian cooking, where they used to make a pasta and chickpea dish or are marinated and added to an antipasto. And canned chickpeas are the best of all the canned beans and although not as good as freshly cooked, are still quite acceptable.

For a quick chickpea salad, you'll need two cups of cooked chickpeas—and canned are fine. In a medium-size bowl, mix together 3 tablespoons of olive oil with 1 tablespoon of white wine vinegar and 1 tablespoon of Dijon mustard. Add 2 tablespoons of chopped fresh parsley, one small onion, peeled and finely chopped, and 2 garlic cloves, peeled and finely minced. Add the two cups of chickpeas and mix well. Season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper and serve at room temperature. This salad can be made a couple of hours before serving. A little chopped diced tomato in the salad also gives it a nice color.

A recent New York *Times* article featured a delicious vegetarian chickpea stew, which the Tunisians eat for breakfast but which I think makes an excellent light supper dish. You'll need 1 pound of chickpeas, washed, picked over and soaked in 2 quarts of water overnight. You'll also need one medium onion, peeled and chopped, 4 large garlic cloves, peeled and finely minced, 1/2 cup of fresh lemon juice, 1 tablespoon ground cumin, and 1/2 teaspoon of cayenne pepper—or you can use liquid hot pepper seasoning to taste.

After soaking, drain the chickpeas and put them in a large, heavy soup pot or Dutch oven with two quarts of water and bring to the boil. Cover, reduce the heat to low and simmer for an hour. Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil over medium heat in a medium-size, heavy nonstick skillet. Add the chopped onion. Cook, stirring often, until the onion is tender—about five minutes. Stir in the 4 minced garlic cloves and the tablespoon of ground cumin and stir together for about 30 seconds. Stir this mixture into the cooking chickpeas.

After the chickpeas have cooked for an hour, stir in the cayenne or liquid hot pepper seasoning and some salt to taste. Cover and continue cooking for another 30 minutes to an hour, or until the chickpeas are very tender. It may well take even longer—it did for me. When the chickpeas are very tender, stir in the lemon juice, taste, and add salt if needed. Dish up and serve in bowls with a good crusty bread or some warmed pita bread and the following condiments.

This condiment list is long and you may not want to use all of them. The condiments include chopped fresh tomatoes, chopped hard-boiled eggs, diced red and green bell peppers, rinsed capers, chopped flat leaf parsley, some more lemon wedges, some coarse sea salt or kosher salt, thinly sliced green onions, both the green and white part, and croutons. This will serve four to six people, and a green salad with some thinly sliced raw mushrooms and shavings of imported Parmesan cheese, dressed with lemon juice and olive oil, makes a great accompaniment.

This soupy stew will taste even better the next day and will keep in the refrigerator for up to four days. Just refresh your condiments each time you serve it. Look for this recipe on our website, www.htradio.net. This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.