



GASTRONOMY BY JON

Pea, Ham & Mint Soup



Ingredients (makes 2 good-sized bowls)

450g garden peas (frozen or fresh)
200g ham hock/thick cut ham - cubed/torn
20g fresh mint (a large bunch)
800ml good quality vegetable stock
1 x medium onion - diced
3 x cloves garlic - crushed
Large knob of butter
Splash of double cream
Coarse salt & cracked black pepper
Olive oil

For the croutons:- dice your choice of fresh bread into rough chunks/cubes. I go for tiger. Toss the bread chunks through some olive oil, salt & pepper. Add crushed garlic & herbs if you like. Roast in a preheated oven at 180 degrees until crunchy & golden.

Method

1. In a large saucepan, sweat down the onions and garlic with a glug of olive oil over a medium heat. After a few minutes, add the butter, a good few grinds of black pepper and continue cooking until soft.
2. Add the peas and stir to coat them in the butter. Then pour in the vegetable stock.
3. Allow to simmer for around 10 - 15 minutes, until the stock is slightly reduced and has taken on some of the flavour from the peas.
4. Remove from the heat and allow to cool until it's no longer steaming. Then throw in almost all the mint, keeping back just a few sprigs for garnishing.
5. Transfer to a blender and whizz it up good! You can also use a hand-blender, but expect a more rustic consistency.
6. Return to the saucepan and stir in the ham (again, keep a touch back to garnish) plus a little double cream to taste.
7. Ladle into bowls and top with more ham, croutons, mint sprigs and a swirl of cream. I also add a few extra loose peas, for extra texture.

I adore this soup. We often see pea & ham or pea & mint. But why pick one when you can have both? The three ingredients work brilliantly together and it's absolutely bursting with flavour! Though you can, of course, omit the ham if you want a vegetarian version. Be sure to use a really good veg stock. The 'jelly pots' or liquid stock packs are a good bet if you aren't making your own. Best served with fresh, chunky bread. Enjoy!