

## Swedish peasoup – Ärtsoppa

Swedish yellow pea soup is a meal that is so old that we don't really know when they started eating it. Peas were the ideal crop for short cool Swedish summers, and if you did it right you could harvest several times before the growing season was up. They were easy to store. You just dried them in the sun and put them in a bag and they lasted as long as you could keep the mice away from them.

Peas were used extensively in a world where most meals were cooked in just one pot over an open fire. They were thick and filling and nutritious. They could also be ground up into flour and mixed with grains to bake bread. The ideal food!

People in Northern Europe have grown peas since the stone age, so we can assume that pea soup is an ancient meal.

In those times, all meat was either dried or salted to be preserved, and had to be soaked and cooked in liquid to restore it and to get the salt out. This is how pea soup was born. Peas in a pot full of water with a piece of salt pork cooking along dispersing its salty flavour among the peas who soaked them up. As simple as it gets!

The Swedish pea soup tradition dictates that it must be eaten on a Thursday. Another tradition that goes way back. Back to Catholic times before the 1500's.

Catholics fast on Friday, which is no big deal in warm climates as long as you drink water, but a much bigger deal in cold climates where you need the calories to stay warm! So on Thursday all would feast on a big bowl of filling pea soup with salt pork. It would carry you through the next day.

Pea soup was a meal that knew no class differences. Most foods were vastly different between the different classes, and most peasants never saw any of the foods that the upper classes ate. Except pea soup! Everybody had pea soup. From the lowliest farmhand to the king of Sweden. In fact there is good reason to believe that Gustav Vasa's son Erik the XIV was killed by eating poisoned peasoup. Allegedly dispensed by his brother Johan. When they opened Eriks grave in the 1950s and examined the skeletal remains, they found a rather large quantity of arsenic in them, so the legend may be true.

Pea soup eating has become a celebrated thing, and small societies have been formed that get together just to eat pea soup with warm punch, an old time arrak flavoured liquor that has been part of the peasoup tradition since the 1700s.

Pancakes or plättar are the customary dessert for this meal.

It is interesting that in ultramodern urban Sweden of today, this tradition is still there.

It is so ingrained in all of us, mostly from schooldays, that no one questions it. And this in a country where everything is questioned.

A few years ago, my husband and I were in Gothenburg to visit the family, and were in town walking around. We ate breakfast in a small restaurant and noticed the sign they displayed for "today's special" it was peasoup and pancakes. It was Thursday!

A few hours later as we wandered from one shop to another, my husband put his nose in the air and exclaimed: "The whole town smells like peasoup"!, and I said: "well...it **is** Thursday! It's **everybody's** special of the day"

We had lunch that day at the Hard Rock Café on the hip main Avenue in Gothenburg. The special there was: **Pea soup and pancakes!!** It was delicious!

