

LIMA BEANS

Also called butter beans down South, lima beans come in two major varieties: baby limas and the plumper, larger Fordhook. The rich, nutty legumes are a key ingredient in succotash, a traditional Native American dish. Limas are available fresh only in summer and early fall, so now's the time to seek them out. —KATE PARHAM

HOW TO SELECT AND STORE

Look for fresh lima beans at a farmers' market or roadside stand, says Emma-lea Garver Ernest, a researcher at the University of Delaware's Extension Vegetable Crops Program. Choose bright-green pods; avoid those that are damaged or limp. You may want to buy baby limas shelled since they're more of a challenge to shell than larger beans. Store limas in the fridge in a breathable bag until you're ready to use them. "They'll last for two weeks in their pods, or one week if they're shelled," Ernest says.

PREP TIPS

Wash the pods, then simply twist and they will pop open, allowing you to extract the beans, says Ernest. Never eat the pods; they're too fibrous. Simmer the beans in water on the stove until tender, about 15 minutes, and they're ready to go. Enjoy with a bit of butter and salt, or add to soups and stews.

TRY THIS

Purée cooked lima beans with olive oil, garlic, red pepper flakes, and lemon juice for a zesty bean dip.

Go Mediterranean and bake limas with feta, tomatoes, and olives.

Blend limas with garlic, green tomatoes, olive oil, and vinegar for an elegant take on gazpacho.