

Akara Fritters (Black-eyed Pea Fritters)

Activities: Cooking

Akara fritters are made of a base of black eyed peas mixed with chopped onions and peppers, then deep-fried food made from ground or mashed black eyed peas, onions; salt, and pepper. They are popular in Ghana and Nigeria, where the black eyed pea is a native food. The fritters are usually eaten as a snack or appetizer, or a breakfast food. Many enslaved Africans in colonial America, and likely at Philipsburg Manor, had their roots in these West African countries.

Ingredients:

½ pound (8oz.) of dried black eyed peas

½ small onion, finely chopped

½ each of one red and one green bell pepper (or one full pepper of either color), finely chopped

Scotch-bonnet or jalapeño pepper, finely chopped (optional)

Salt and pepper

Oil for frying (corn, vegetable, or peanut)

Equipment:

- Bowl or pot to soak peas overnight
- Mortar and pestle or potato masher to mash the peas
- Large, deep pot or deep fryer
- Table spoon or wooden spoon for creating fritters from batter and dropping into oil (an ice cream scoop also works)
- Slotted spoon for removing fritters from oil
- Paper towels, to drain fritters after frying

Instructions:

1. Soak peas overnight in just enough water to cover the peas.
2. Pour off water and gently rub peas to remove outer skin.
3. In a mortar with a pestle, or in a large mixing bowl with a potato masher, grind or mash peas until thick, but not liquefied. If using a mortar and pestle, you may need to do this in several batches.
4. If using a mortar and pestle, transfer mashed peas to a mixing bowl (otherwise, use the same bowl. Stir well with spoon, batter will increase slightly in volume.
5. Stir in chopped onion and peppers, add salt and pepper to taste.
6. In a large pot or deep fryer, heat 2-3 inches of oil over medium-high heat. To test the heat, add a small drop of batter. When it sizzles gently, it's hot enough to begin frying.
7. Using two spoons, one to scoop mixture and the other to help scape it from the first spoon into the pot, drop pea mixture into hot oil. Be sure to do this gently so as not to splash oil. Fritters should be 1 to 2 inches in size. Add only a few fritters at a time. Adding too many will cool the oil down (and make it hard to flip the fritters).
8. Fry until golden brown. If necessary, flip fritters over carefully to allow both sides to brown evenly.
9. Remove with slotted spoon and drain on paper towels.
10. Continue until all the batter has been used. Serve hot or at room temperature.

For Additional Reading

About the culture and culinary traditions of enslaved Africans in the Colonial North:

<https://peoplenotproperty.hudsonvalley.org/embracing-traditions.php>

About the history of black eyed peas and Hercules, the enslaved chef at Mount Vernon

<https://shakespeareandbeyond.folger.edu/2019/02/12/akara-africa-black-eyed-pea-fritters/>