

# WHITE BEANS

*with Pancetta and Peas*

SERVES 4

White beans are one of the kitchen's universal donors; they go just as well with poultry and meat as they do with a variety of fish. Here, they're complemented by sautéed pancetta, sweet peas, and—most dramatically—caramelized fennel, which gives the whole dish a pleasing, springy flavor.

Serve this with white-fleshed fish, roast chicken, and game.

<b>8 ounces dried white beans, preferably Great Northern or cannellini (about 1 cup)</b>	<b>1/2 small bulb fennel, finely diced</b>
<b>2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil</b>	<b>2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced</b>
<b>Salt</b>	<b>1/2 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano</b>
<b>2/3 cup defrosted frozen peas, or shelled fresh peas</b>	<b>1 tablespoon butter</b>
<b>4 ounces pancetta, finely diced</b>	<b>2 tablespoons sliced parsley</b>
	<b>Freshly ground black pepper</b>

Soak the white beans overnight in enough cold water to cover by 4 inches.

Drain the beans and put them in a heavy-bottomed pot. Add 3 cups cold water and the extra-virgin olive oil, and season with salt. Bring to a simmer, cover, and continue to simmer until the beans are tender, 40 to 50 minutes. There should be approximately 1/4 cup of liquid left in the pot; reserve it and the beans in separate bowls to keep the beans from becoming soggy.

If using fresh peas, while the beans are simmering, bring a small pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the peas and cook for 2 minutes. Drain and refresh under cold running water to stop the cooking and set the color. Drain again and set aside.

Rinse out and dry the pot you used to cook the beans. Put the pancetta in the pot and cook over medium heat until the fat is rendered and the pancetta is crispy, approximately 5 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and set aside.

Add the fennel to the pot with the pancetta fat and sauté slowly over medium heat until nicely caramelized, approximately 25 minutes. Transfer to a bowl using a slotted spoon, leaving behind as much fat as possible.

Add the garlic to the pot and sauté until lightly browned, approximately 5 minutes. Add the beans and their liquid, pancetta, fennel, peas, cheese, butter, and parsley. Season with salt and pepper and cook for a minute or two, stirring, until all of the ingredients are warm and the flavors are integrated. Transfer to a bowl and serve.