Split Pea Soup with Dill and Cardamom

Based on a recipe from my forthcoming cookbook, *Pike Place Market Recipes* (Sasquatch 2012), which is itself based on a verbal recipe from the ladies at the counter at Bavarian Meats in the Pike Place Market that uses their smoked ham, this soup blends the earthiness of split peas and leftover ham bone with enough dried dill and cardamom for intrigue, but not so much they take over the soup. You can puree it before stirring the ham pieces back in, if you prefer.

Time: 40 minutes active time
Makes: 4 to 6 servings

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, thinly sliced
1 large carrot, peeled and chopped
1 celery rib, chopped
2 large cloves garlic, smashed
Salt and freshly ground pepper
1 (2-pound) ham hock, or meaty bone from a holiday ham
4 cups vegetable broth
2 cups water
1 bay leaf
1 tablespoon dried dill
1 1/4 teaspoons ground cardamom
1 pound dried split peas
1/4 cup cream or half and half (optional)

Heat a large, heavy soup pot over medium heat. When hot, add the oil, then the onion, and cook, stirring occasionally, for about 10 minutes, or until the onion is soft. Add the carrots, celery, and garlic, season with salt and pepper, and cook another 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the ham hock, broth, water, bay leaf, dill, cardamom, and split peas, stir, and bring to a simmer. Reduce the heat to low and cook at a bare simmer until the peas are soft and the meat falls off the bone, about 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Remove the bay leaf.

Transfer the ham to a cutting board and set aside until cool enough to handle. Finely chop the meat, discarding the bones and any fatty parts, and add it to the soup. Add additional water, if necessary, to thin the soup to your desired consistency, and rewarm over low heat. Season to taste with salt and pepper (you won’t need much salt because the meat is usually salty enough), stir in the cream, and serve hot.