

Grow Your Own Peas & Beans

Peas fresh from the garden are delicious and add both variety and nutrition to meals. They can be eaten direct from the garden, but also frozen, canned or dried for later use.

TYPES OF PEAS

There are two types of peas, ones with edible pods and those that need to be shelled. Garden or English peas, are the latter and are harvested as soon as the pods are well-filled but the seeds are still tender and sweet. When small and tender, these peas can be eaten raw in salads. For cooking, shell them just before using and cook immediately. Some suggested garden pea cultivars are Little Marvel, Thomas Laxton, Wando, Knight, Alderman (tall-growing), and Green Arrow.

Snow peas have edible flat pods and very small seeds. They should be picked when very young, just as the peas start to form. If not picked at this stage, they can be shelled and eaten as garden peas, but are more starchy and not as sweet. Commonly grown cultivars of snow peas include Mammoth Melting Sugar, Dwarf Grey Sugar, and Oregon Sugar Pod.

Sugar snap peas are also an edible pod pea but have larger and sweeter seeds and a thicker pod. They are grown to full size and then eaten. Suggested sugar snap peas cultivars include Sugar Daddy, Sugar Ann (dwarf), Sugar Snap, and Super Sugar.

TYPES OF BEANS

Beans may be harvested at various times depending on how they are to be used. When the seeds are immature and the pods edible, they are used as snap beans.

High quality snap beans should be harvested when tender and well-shaped, before the developing seeds cause the pods to bulge. As the seeds mature, they may be used as green shell beans or if seeds mature fully and pods are allowed to dry as dry shell beans.

Bean plants may have either a bush habit of growth, or a pole/vining habit. As with climbing pea varieties, pole beans should be staked or trellised for ease of picking. Bush beans and peas are recommended if garden space is limited. However, upright trellises can also be real space savers. There are many desirable bean cultivars to choose from:

- Bush green: Tendergreen, Tendercrop, Blue Lake, Top Crop, Bush Romano, Derby
- Bush wax: Goldcrop, Sungold
- Bush purple podded: Royal Burgandy
- Pole green: Kentucky Wonder, Kentucky Blue, Blue Lake, and Romano.

PLANTING REQUIREMENTS

Peas are a cool-season crop and may be planted in early spring as soon as the soil can be worked. Sow seeds about 2.5cm (1") deep and 5cm (2") apart in the row. Low growing varieties can be grown in rows 46 to 61cm (18 to 24") apart. Climbers need 91cm (3') between rows, or plant a double row 15cm (6") apart on either side of trellis. Peas require a pH of 6.0 to 6.7.

Beans are a warm season crop and should be planted after danger of frost has passed. Sow seeds 2.5cm (1") deep in heavy soils and 3 to 5cm (1.8 to 2") deep in sandy soils. Bush beans should be spaced 5 to 10cm (2 to 4") apart in the row. Space pole beans 15 to 20cm (6 to 8") apart along a trellis or plant several beans to a pole. Both peas and beans can be grown in a variety of soils, but good drainage is essential. Beans prefer a slightly more acid condition of pH 5.8 to 6.3.

Applying a garden inoculant to the soil while planting encourages root growth and the ability to absorb nitrogen from the soil.

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FERTILIZATION

A vegetable fertilizer can be broadcast and worked into the soil before planting time, or banded 5cm (2") to the side and 8cm (3") below the seed at the time of planting. A later side dressing, after pods begin to form, may be necessary if plants appear yellowish or are not growing well.

CULTURAL PRACTICES

Weed control is essential especially in the first six weeks after planting, shallow cultivation and hand pulling are the preferred methods. The soil should be kept evenly moist, but well drained.

Overhead watering should be done early in the day to reduce the incidence of leaf diseases that occur when the leaves remain wet overnight.

An organic mulch about 5cm (2") deep will conserve soil moisture and reduce weed problems.

Diseases that affect beans include anthracnose, bacterial blight, mosaic, root rot and rust.

Pea diseases include powdery mildew, root rot and wilt. If possible, rotate the location of peas and beans in the garden to reduce the incidence of soil-borne diseases that can build up over time.

HARVEST AND HANDLING

When are my peas and beans ripe? Depends on what you mean by ripe, so you'll have to learn by trial and error. Fully mature pods are round and hard, younger ones more oval shaped and give a little when squeezed. Also, the pods are slightly translucent, so you can judge the size of the peas by stooping down and holding them to the light.

Once peas and beans begin to reach the appropriate stage for picking, harvesting will continue on a daily basis for several days or even weeks with succession planting. Peas and beans taste best immediately after harvest, but may be stored in the refrigerator for a few days. The same applies for freezing and canning. For best quality, freezing and canning should be done within a few hours after picking.