

How to grow beans

Garden beans, both snap and Lima, are among the favorite vegetables for many people. Some home gardeners will also grow dry beans and edible soybeans. Types include pole beans, bush beans, wax beans, French and Italian beans. These garden beans can be grown in Michigan, a major commercial producer of dry beans.

Types of beans

Bush bean varieties are well-suited for smaller gardens and are easier to grow because they do not need any support. They come in green, yellow (wax) and purple varieties.

Romano (Italian) beans can be grown as either bush or climbing beans that form large, flat, stringless pods. They come in green, yellow or purple varieties. Romano beans can be used fresh like green beans or left to mature and be used like dry beans.

French (Haricot vert) beans resemble green beans but have extra-slim, flavorful pods. They can be found in bush and climbing varieties. They may be eaten fresh or cooked.

Pole beans or climbing beans can grow five to eight feet tall and their vines need support. Both bush and pole beans are harvested when the pods are expanded, before the beans are visible inside.

Lima beans, both bush and pole varieties, are grown like other shell beans. They are especially sensitive to cold soil and take longer to mature than green beans. Smaller-seeded types mature earlier.

Shell or pod beans are dry bean varieties that are eaten when the beans in the pod are plump and mature, but still soft. They are shelled like peas because the pod is too tough to eat, and then cooked.

Edible soybeans, also called Edamame (meaning "pods on a branch" in Japanese), are



different than field soybeans used for livestock feed. Edible soybeans have larger seeds, a milder taste, and are more tender and easier to digest. These soybeans are eaten when the shells are green, and the soybeans inside are plump. This is similar to eating shell or pod beans because of the stage of maturity when they are picked. They are traditionally cooked in boiling, salted water and then the tough outer pod is removed.

Dry beans come in many kinds and colors. The pods are grown to maturity and harvested when the plants dry up at the end of the season. These include kidney beans, navy beans, pinto beans and black beans. Cannellini beans are white kidney beans. Other varieties belong to the heirloom or heritage category and have been grown for more than 50 years. These include Jacob's Cattle, Vermont Cranberry and Dragon's Tongue, just to name a few.

Growing beans

Beans do best in loose, well-drained soil with some organic matter and a soil pH of 6.5. They need full sun -- at least eight hours per day. Beans are frost-tender crops that need warm soils to germinate their seeds. Soil temperature

at the time of planting should exceed 60°F. (Note this often does not occur until the end of May in Michigan.) Soil temperature is taken in the top inch of soil early in the morning before the sun has warmed the soil for the day. Plant seeds at two-week intervals to guarantee harvests of fresh beans throughout the summer. Fresh beans, depending on the variety, grow to maturity in 45 to 72 days. Most bush bean varieties can be picked after 55 to 60 days. Do not pick beans when plants are wet because then they are easily bruised and diseases may spread.

Planting

Beans are usually planted from seed. Follow the directions on the seed package as to depth and spacing. If growing climbing beans, be prepared to supply sturdy trellises or poles to support the crop.

Watering

Keep plants watered, especially during dry weather. Be careful not to cause the soil to become waterlogged. If possible, keep the water at the soil level and off the leaves. Since beans require warmer soils than many vegetables, delay mulching until after seeds have germinated and are growing well in early to mid-summer.

Fertilization

Follow soil test recommendations, but only fertilize lightly with nitrogen. Beans and other plants in the legume family can get nitrogen from the air.

Weed management

Controlling weeds around beans is essential to getting a good crop. Weeds compete for water, nutrients and sunlight. Hoe, cultivate, or hand pull to control weeds.

Notes:

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