

How to grow peas

Peas (*Pisum sativum*)

Family: Fabaceae (Legumes)

Season: Cool

Ease of growing: Easy

Fertility needs: Low

Water needs: Low

Common propagation: Seed

Seed facts

Germination temperatures: 40°F to 85°F

Germination time: 6 to 17 days

Viability: 3 years

Direct sow: April (spring crop); August (fall crop)

Planning facts

Spacing: 1" to 2" in 3" band; trellis rows 4' to 6'

Plants per square foot: 8

Succession sow: every 2 to 4 weeks

Days to harvest: 50 to 70 days

Preparation and planting

Peas are a cool season crop and tend to perform best with early spring plantings, although fall plantings are possible. They perform best on well drained soils with pH above 6. Although peas have low N requirements, they often benefit from P and K additions before planting. Because you can sow seeds early in the spring, it is best to prepare the soil the prior fall. Soak seeds for 24 hours to hasten germination.

Care

Tall varieties need support when they reach 3 inches tall for optimal production. If mulched, peas will rarely need watering early in the spring. The covering will also help to keep the soil cool.

Major pests

Insects: Cutworms, armyworms, leafhoppers, aphids, mites, pea weevils.

Diseases: Powdery mildew and damping-off.

Variety selection

Peas include shelling types, snap peas, and snow peas. Some varieties have smooth seeds; others have wrinkled seeds. The wrinkled seed varieties produce sweeter peas and are usually planted in the spring. The smooth seed varieties contain more starch and are hardier, so they are usually planted in the fall. You can purchase both tall and short varieties. Tall ones reach a height of 6 feet, while the short ones grow to around 2 feet. "Afila" types have many tendrils but few leaves, and thus don't need trellising as they cling to neighboring plants. These types are also easier to hand harvest due to their more visible pods.

Harvesting and storage

Harvest garden peas for green shell use when the peas have filled the pod but before the pod starts to deteriorate. Peas are usually ready to harvest about three weeks after they blossom. Pick sugar snap pea pods when they are full-sized and contain large peas. Pick snow peas when the pods have formed but the peas are just beginning to form little bumps. If peas are left on the plant, the sugar in the seeds will convert to starch. This also happens after you remove the pod from the vine, so use or process peas immediately after picking.

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