

How to Grow Peas - Overview/Description: Peas are one of the oldest cultivated vegetables. Originally the tender tops of the plants were cooked along with the pea pods. Today we have shelling, snap, snow and sugar pod peas. They are a rather brief, cool season vegetable that are well worth the easy effort to enjoy them fresh from the garden.

Zone: Annual

Exposure: Full sun in cooler temperatures or partial shade.

Mature Size: Varieties can be tall (approx. 5'), semi-dwarf (about 2' to 4') and dwarf (2' or less)

Days to Harvest: Harvest when the peas have enlarged in the pods. To judge this you will need to gently squeeze the pods. The exception is snow peas, which are grown for their edible pods and are harvested when the pods reach about 3" in length, but are still flat. You can also eat the tender first shoots or even the vines and tendrils themselves in soups and stir fries.

Cultural Requirements & Maintenance: You will see peas grouped as shelling, snap, sugar and snow peas. Sugar and snow peas have edible pods. Peas are also categorized as either tall, semi-dwarf and dwarf varieties. Older varieties were all tall.

There is a tradition of planting the first peas on St. Patrick's Day. You can plant in spring, as soon as the soil can be worked, however an early planting will not necessarily germinate any earlier than if you wait for the ground to warm. Peas are a cool weather crop, but they don't like soil that is cold or wet. The seeds can survive a frost, but not the plants. So a fall crop can be iffy unless there is about two months between summer heat and fall frost. Southern gardeners can plant the seeds in the fall and wait for them to germinate in the warm days of spring. Once temperatures steady at 70 degrees F., pea plants begin slowing down and die.

You will sometimes see peas and beans sold with bacteria inoculants that forms nitrogen converting nodules on the roots of legumes and helps in starting plants. The inoculants can't work if the seeds have already been treated with a fungicide to prevent rot. The fungicide is a bright pink, to alert you that it is there. Peas also do best with a soil pH between 6.0 and 6.5.

All types of peas need some type of support while growing trellising can be done with fencing, mesh, bushy cut tree and shrub branches or other plants. Because of the trellising, peas are usually planted in rows or bands of about 3-4 inches. Cover the seed with only an inch or two of soil and firm.

Extend your harvest season by planting in 2 week successions and/or by planting varieties that mature at different times.

Pest & Problems: The biggest problem of pea plants is root rot, which causes the foliage to turn brown and die. Insuring the soil is well-drained and rotating your pea crop each year will help. Peas are also susceptible to powdery mildew in humid weather. If this is a problem, look for resistant varieties.