

Green Peas

Green peas grow in pods on vines. The plants can be determinate or indeterminate. Determinate cultivars are bushy and less than 3 ft. in height; indeterminate cultivars will grow to over 5 ft. in height. Growing plants in twin rows or on a fence or short trellis will keep the plants erect and productive.

There are three main types of peas grown in the home garden: 1) Garden peas (also called English peas) are either smooth and starchy or wrinkled sugary seeds (with superior flavor and quality); 2) Snap peas (edible pods) and; 3) Snow peas (flat edible pods). The starchy smooth round peas are generally dried and used in soups. The tender snow peas are picked young before the seeds develop.

Peas are hardy, but seed germination is delayed when soil temperatures are below 40°F. Warmer soils (up to 75°F.) will speed germination and emergence, but late crops are more likely to suffer from heat stress. Adequate soil moisture is critical at pod fill. Fall-planted peas often perform poorly in Maryland, because the seed doesn't germinate readily in warm soil and killing frost arrives before pods can mature.

Planting:

Sow seed in garden 1 to 3 inches apart in early spring when soil temperatures reach at least 40°F. Pre-germinate seed for earlier harvests. Days to maturity: 50 to 70. Plant growth is favored by intermediate temperatures (65°-70°F) while flowering is accelerated by long days with cool air temperature.

Plant in wide rows, about 18 inches apart. Double rows may be spaced 8 to 10 inches apart in rows 18 to 24 inches on center. Plants grown together will hold each other up. Cultivars vary in branching habit. Un-branched types should be planted closer together and branching types planted farther apart. Late maturing, tall cultivars can be trellised to improve growth and make harvest easier.

Pre-germination: Another method of starting seeds is pre-germination- sprouting the seeds before they are planted in pots or in the garden. By closely controlling temperature and moisture you can achieve a higher and quicker rate of germination.

Lay pea seeds between the folds of a moistened paper towel and place inside a clear, perforated plastic bag. Keep seeds moist and in a warm place. When roots begin to show, plant the seeds into containers or directly into your garden. When transplanting seedlings be careful not to break off tender roots. Keep the transplants from drying out until they become established.

When planting seeds in a container to set out in the garden later, place one seed in a 2- to 3-inch container. Plant the seeds to only half the recommended depth. Gently press a little moistened media over the sprouted seed. Keep the pots in a warm place and care for them just as for any other newly transplanted seedling.

Cultivation:

- **Fertilizing** – Incorporate a balanced fertilizer before seeding. Growth is inhibited by acid soils, pH 6.0 and lower. Heavy user of nitrogen (although a legume, peas fix little nitrogen).
- **Weeding** – Garden pea has a fibrous root system that includes a taproot. Cultivate carefully- slice off young weeds at the soil line or use a thick mulch to prevent weeds.
- **Watering** – Keep the root zone moist by watering deeply and regularly during dry periods. Water more frequently when pods begin to develop.

Harvesting:

- **Garden peas** – harvest and shell when pods are plump and well-filled, but before seed becomes starchy.
- **Snow peas** – pick when pods are large and flat but before seed begins to enlarge.
- **Snap peas** (edible pods) – when pods are succulent and seeds are small. Remove “strings” from along the suture of the pod before cooking or eating.

Storage and Preservation:

Cool quickly to remove field heat; 32 degrees F is ideal. Store in refrigerator in a vented plastic bag.

Nutrition:

A source of Vitamins A, K and C, thiamin, folate and protein.

Preparation & Use:

Remove peas from shell by pulling the string down the length of the pod and pushing out the peas with your thumb. Steam, boil, microwave or sauté; also add to soups, stews and casseroles.

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