

# Growing and Caring for Peas

**T**here are many reasons for gardeners to plant peas in their vegetable gardens. Peas are delicious and full of vitamin A, B, and C. The opportunity to buy truly fresh peas at the market is rare - the sugar in peas begins to turn to starch as soon as they are picked, diminishing their flavor quickly. Peas can be planted real early - even here in the northeast. They even tolerate frost and snow! In fact, peas actually need cool weather to thrive; they cannot mature during the hot summer. So, after a long winter, peas are a northern gardener's first shot at playing in the dirt. They can be planted well before the last spring frost date (between April 1 and May 15). Pea seeds can germinate at temperatures as low as 40 degrees F! You can also plant peas between July 1-15 for a fall harvest.

There are three main types of peas that are typically grown by gardeners:

- English garden peas** have a tough inedible pod that protects the sweet, tender green peas inside.

- Edible-podded peas** include both Snow Peas and Snap Peas.

  - Snow Peas have flat, tender pods with small, undeveloped peas inside.

  - Snap Peas have crunchy, delicious plump pods with sweet full-sized peas inside.

- Southern peas**, which include black-eyed peas, crowders and creams, are called peas by southerners. They are referred to as shell beans in the north.

## PLANTING

Peas should be in full sun as early as the ground can be worked in the spring. Although they will grow in shady areas, the sugar content will be low and the flavor will suffer. Sandy soil will dry out quickly in the spring allowing you to plant your peas early. However, if you have slow-drying clay soil, consider making raised beds for growing your peas so you can get an early start. Raised beds have a higher soil temperature which will hasten germination. Mix compost or dehydrated manure into the soil before planting.

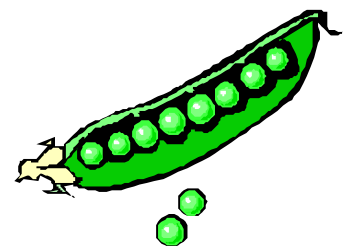
Peas and other legumes benefit from bacteria that live in nodules along their roots. These bacteria draw nitrogen from the soil and "fix" it into a form that plants use as a nutrient. You can increase this nitrogen-fixing by inoculating your seeds with nitrogen fixing bacteria before you plant. Inoculant is sold as a wettable powder and is easy to use. Just moisten the seeds by placing them in a small amount of water, add a little bit of inoculant, stir until the seeds are coated with powder and plant them right away. You should be sure to inoculate your seeds if you are planting in an area previously uncultivated.

Fertilize the area to be planted (approximately 2 lbs/ 100sq. Feet) with 5-10-10 or its equivalent before sowing. High levels of nitrogen in soil will reduce pod production. If you are growing pole varieties, put up trellises or support before you plant so as not to disturb established plant roots. Plastic or nylon netting, wire fencing or single wires can be used for supports.

Sow seeds 1-2" apart in wide rows or double rows. Dwarf varieties can be planted in wide rows using no supports; the vines will support each other. Single rows should be planted 2-3 feet apart with a support. Double rows can have a support down the middle. Firm down the soil after sowing and water them in. When the plants reach 6" or so, the tendrils will grasp the support and climb.

## CARE & HARVEST

If you have light, sandy soil that dries out easily or if you're planting in the hot summer for a fall crop, use a 3-4" trench to plant in. The trench will collect and provide adequate water while plants are young. When plants reach 6" or so, add dehydrated manure and soil to the trench filling it about halfway. This will help to insulate pea roots keeping them cool. Add more soil in a few weeks.



(*Pisum sativum*)  
Family: Leguminosae

Avoid hoeing deeply around peas because the roots are delicate and damage easily. Most varieties should be ready to harvest in 55-80 days. Peas should be harvested to encourage production. It is best to pick them in the morning after the dew has evaporated when the area pods are crispest. It is best to stay out of the garden when it's wet in morning dew or recently rained because that's when water-borne disease bacteria are easily spread.

When harvesting, use two hands or pinch off pods with fingernail or use scissors. Be careful not to break the brittle pea vines. Pick **garden peas** when pods are round and full. Color will fade and pods will harden when overripe. **Snow peas** should be harvested when peas are undeveloped and pods are young, bright green and flat. Harvest **snap peas** when the pods are plump and crisp.

## PEST & DISEASES

If you practice good gardening hygiene, you shouldn't have many problems growing peas. Here are some of the more common pests and diseases of peas.

**Peas aphids** attack young plants and can be controlled by washing the plants with mildly soapy water.

**Slugs** enjoy feasting on the tender pea vines. Use slug bait, beer traps, or hand pick to control.

**Mosaic** is a disease spread by aphids. The plant will look stunted and the leaves will be mottled and faded. Control the aphids to prevent mosaic.

**Fusarium Wilt** is caused by a fungus that lives in the soil and enters the plant through its roots. The leaves will turn yellow and the plant's growth will be stunted. Remove infected plants from the garden and burn them. Be sure to rotate your pea crop the following season. Look for varieties that state they are resistant to fusarium wilt when selecting seeds.

**Bacterial Blight** is a disease carried on infected seeds. Leaves will have dark spots and pea pods will have yellow to brown water-soaked spots. Stems will have purple to black spots near the soil line. This disease cannot be cured. Destroy infected and surrounding plants. To prevent bacterial blight, be sure to use certified seeds and do not work around plants when wet.

## VARIETIES

There are many different varieties of peas available. This is just a short listing of some of the better known varieties out there. As you look through seed catalogs and seed racks at your local center, be sure you already have an idea of what to plant. For instance, do you want dwarf varieties? Are you planting a late crop? Do you need seeds that are resistant to fusarium wilt? Have fun!

EARLY (55 to 64 days to harvest)	MIDSEASON (65 to 70 days to harvest)	LATE (70 to 80 days to harvest)
Garden Pea - Alaska, Early Frosty, Maestro, Little Marvel, Thomas Laxton	Garden Pea - Green Arrow, Lincoln, Novella, Wando	Garden Pea - Rondo, Morse's No. 60, Giant Stride
Snow Pea - Snowbird, Norli	Snow Pea - Mammoth Melting Sugar, Oregon Sugar Pod II, Blizzard	Snap Pea - Sugar Daddy
Snap Pea - Sugar Ann, Sweet Snap, Sugar Bon	Snap Pea - Sugar Snap, Sugar Rae	

---

**For More Information on Capital District Community Gardens' programs or to make a tax-deductible donation contact:**



40 River Street, Troy, NY 12180  
518.274.8685 CDCG@juno.com  
www.cdcg.org