



Thursday, May 1, 2025

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How to Grow Peas: The Complete Guide



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Planting, Growing, and Harvesting Peas

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)

Last Updated: January 2, 2025



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Peas, please! The sweet taste of glorious garden-grown peas is nothing like what you find in grocery stores. These green beauties are nature's candy fresh off the vine! Peas are one of the season's first crops, planted as soon

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from sowing and growing to harvest

and storage!

About Peas

Peas are easy to grow, but their growing period is limited. It's essential to plant them early enough in spring so they mature while the weather is still cool! (This means planting in most parts of the United States and Canada in February, March, or April.) However, they can also be grown as a fall or winter crop in warmer regions.

Peas do not stay fresh long after harvest, so enjoy their taste as soon as possible! Those peas in grocery stores are often starchy in taste, which you'll find has no comparison to garden-fresh peas.

Three varieties of peas suit most garden and culinary needs:

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- **Sweet peas**, aka garden peas or English peas (*Pisum sativum* ssp. *sativum*), have inedible pods from which the seeds (peas) are taken.
- **Snow peas** (*P. sativum* var. *macrocarpon*) produce edible, flat, stringless pods containing small peas.
- **Snap peas** (*P. sativum* var. *macrocarpon* ser. cv.) produce thick, edible pods containing large/full-size peas.

Great planting companions for peas include: Chives, Mint, Alyssum, Carrot, Corn, Cucumber, Radish, Turnip, and Beans. [Learn more about Companion Planting.](#)

Video Demo: Growing Peas from Sowing to Harvest

Learn all about growing peas in our video demonstration, and then see the instructions in the guide below.

...rowing Peas From Sowing to Harvest



Read Next

- [Companion Planting Chart and Guide for Vegetable Gardens](#)
- [When to Plant Peas](#)
- [10 Fast-Growing Vegetables for Cool Weather](#)

PLANTING

Select a sunny location and well-draining soil.

Although peas can grow in part shade, they won't be as sweet or productive as those grown in full sun. Prepare the soil, preferably in the fall, mixing in aged manure and/or compost, and mulch well—peas like well-draining soil.

When to Plant Peas

- Sow seeds 4 to 6 weeks before the last spring frost date when the soil is cool or when it is at the desired temperature. Peas planted in cold (40°F) soil will germinate

60°F (but not more than 85°F) will

catch up.

- Snow will not hurt emerging pea plants, but several days with temperatures in the teens might. Be prepared to plant again if the first peas don't make it. Alternatively, try starting your peas in a cold frame.
- A second round of peas can be planted in the late summer or early fall, approximately 6 to 8 weeks before your first fall frost date.

Here are some more tips on when to start planting peas.



How to Plant Peas

- Peas are best direct-seeded right in the ground and do not like their roots disturbed. But transplanting is possible if you start seeds in biodegradable pots; you'll

- Where spring is long and wet, plant seeds in raised garden beds.
- To speed germination, soak seeds in water overnight before planting.
- Sow seeds 1 inch deep (slightly deeper if the soil is dry) and about 2 inches apart.
Do not thin.
- Plant rows 7 inches apart.
- Regarding crop rotation, do not plant peas in the same place more than once every four years.
- Like those of other legumes, pea roots fix nitrogen in the soil, making it available for other plants.
- In terms of fertilizer, peas need phosphorus and potassium, but excess nitrogen will encourage foliage growth instead of flowers or pods. Learn more about soil amendments.
- Bush peas can reach 18 to 30 inches tall. Pole types can grow at least 4 to 6 feet tall. Both types benefit from support (especially bush peas above 2 feet and all pole peas). Install thin tree branches or twiggy sticks (pea sticks), trellises, chicken wire, strings, or netting before plants establish their shallow roots. See instructions on how to build trellises and supports for peas.

Peas on St. Patrick's Day

It's an old American tradition to plant peas on St. Patrick's Day! Our retired editor, Janice, shows us her trick on how to plant peas in early spring if there's snow!

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St. Patrick's Day (March 17) is the traditional day for **planting peas**, one of the easiest plants to grow. It's said to bring luck come harvest time. And it makes sense: Soil is typically thawed and workable, and these veggies prefer to get started in chilly spring weather.

Planting Peas: Easy Pea-sey



GROWING

- Water peas sparsely with no more than 1 inch per week, unless the plants are wilting. We don't want to encourage pea rot. But also do not let the plants dry out. If this happens, no pods will be produced.
- Gently remove intrusive weeds by hand. If necessary, hoe or cultivate, but carefully avoid disturbing peas' shallow, fragile roots.
- Pea leaves turn yellow for several reasons. Often, this is due to the stress of hot weather. Provide partial shade (e.g., row covers) and water properly during the hottest time of day.
- Fertilizing plants is not usually required if the plants are mulched deeply with grass clippings, shredded leaves, or another

Types

Shelling Peas: Also known as garden or sweet peas, these are the most common types of peas available. Some good varieties to try include:

- ‘**Green Arrow**’: 2- to 3-foot vines; no support required; high yields; tolerant of mildew and Fusarium wilt
- ‘**Lincoln**’: 2- to 3-foot vines; no support required; tolerant of mildew and Fusarium wilt
- The classic ‘**Wando**’: suitable for freezing
- ‘**Thomas Laxton**’: high sugar content
- ‘**Progress No. 9**’: good disease resistance
- ‘**Little Marvel**’: grows only 15 inches tall

Snap Peas: You eat the entire tender pod of snap peas. Some good varieties to try are:

- ‘**Sugar Ann**’: vines grow only 2 feet tall, no support required.
- ‘**Sugar Snap**’: the original (Calvin’s), just brought back; carried only by Johnny’s Selected Seeds
- ‘**Early Snap**’: an early-maturing version produces peas 10 to 14 days earlier than ‘Sugar Snap’

Snow Peas: Common in Chinese cooking, these flat-podded peas have edible pods. Some good varieties to try include:

- ‘**Mammoth Melting Sugar**’: 4- to 5-foot vines; stringless pods; wilt tolerant
- ‘**Oregon Sugar Pod II**’: grows only 2-1/2 feet tall
- ‘**Snowbird**’: resistant to fusarium wilt

HARVESTING

How do you know when peas are ready to be picked?

Most varieties of peas are ready to harvest 60 to 70 days after planting. Peas mature quickly, so check daily once you see the flowers in bloom.

- Pick snow peas when the delicate pods begin to show immature seeds inside.
- Gather snap peas when the pods become plump yet are still glossy and filled with sweet-tasting peas.
- Pick shell peas before the pods become waxy.



Photo credit: StanRohrer/GettyImages

How to Harvest Peas

- Harvest peas in the morning after the dew has dried; they are crispier then.
- Harvest regularly to encourage more pods to develop.
- Use two hands when you pick peas to avoid damaging the plant. Hold the vine with one hand and pull the pods off with the other.
- Peas are at the peak of flavor immediately after harvest.
- Pea pods that have hardened or turned a dull color are overmature. Mature plants usually stop producing and die back in hot summer weather.
- If you missed your peas' peak period, you can still pick, dry, and shell them for use in winter soups.



How to Store Peas

- Store peas in the refrigerator for about 5 days. Place in paper bags, then wrap in plastic.
- Or, freeze peas: Shell sweet peas, blanch, immerse in cold water, drain, and pack in sealed containers.
- De-string/trim snow or snap peas and prepare as above.

GARDENING PRODUCTS



PESTS/DISEASES

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
Aphids	Insect	Misshapen/yellow leaves; distorted flowers/fruit; sticky "honeydew" (excrement produced by aphids); sooty, black mold that forms on honeydew; large presence of ants on plants	Grow companion plants to either attract aphids away (nasturtiums) or repel them outright (basil, rosemary, strong-scented plants); knock aphids off plants with water spray, apply insecticidal soap; put banana or orange peel around plants; wipe leaves with a 1-2% solution of liquid dish soap and water every 2-3 days for 2 weeks; add native plants to attract aphid predators. Find images and more information about aphids here.
Fusarium Wilt	Fungus	Plants wilt (sometimes on just one side) in daytime; leaves turn yellow (lower ones first); later, entire plant wilts/dies; growth is stunted; stem cross section reveals brown discoloration	Destroy infected plants; avoid excessive nitrogen in soil; in acidic soils, raise pH to 7.0; choose resistant varieties; disinfect tools between use; practice crop rotation
Downy Mildew	Fungus	Yellow, angular spots on upper leaf surfaces that turn brown; white/purple/gray cottony growth on leaf undersides only; distorted leaves; defoliation	Remove plant debris; choose resistant varieties; ensure good air circulation; avoid overhead watering

<u>Mexican Bean Beetles</u>	Insect	Lacey, skeletonized leaves; dark holes on pods	Remove by hand; purchase and release beneficial wasp <i>Pediobius foveolatus</i> when beetle larvae are observed; destroy severely infested plants. Find images and more information about Mexican bean beetles here.
<u>Powdery Mildew</u>	Fungus	Typically, white spots on upper leaf surfaces expand to flour-like coating over entire leaves; foliage may yellow/die; distortion/stunting of leaves/flowers	Destroy infected leaves or plants; choose resistant varieties; plant in full sun, if possible; ensure good air circulation; spray plants with 1 tsp baking soda dissolved in 1 qt water; remove infected plant matter from garden and destroy (don't compost). Find images and more information about powdery mildew here.
Root-knot Nematodes	Insect	Roots become "knotted" or galled; plants stunted/yellow/wilted	Destroy affected plant matter (especially roots); choose resistant varieties; expose soil to sun (solarize); add aged manure/compost; disinfect gardening tools between uses; till soil in autumn; practice crop rotation
Wireworms	Insect	Pest affects newly planted seeds and young plants. Seeds hollowed; seedlings severed; stunting/wilting; roots eaten	Sow seeds in warm soil for quick germination; provide good drainage; remove plant debris at end of season; practice crop rotation. If infestation is bad enough, trap by digging 2- to 4-inch-deep holes every 3 to 10 feet, fill with mix of germinating beans/corn/peas or potato sections as bait, cover with soil or a board; in 1 week, uncover and kill collected wireworms.

<u>White Mold</u>	Fungus	<p>Pods near the ground show cottony mold and black patches, and they are slimy rather than leathery or dry, becoming inedible.</p>	<p>Gather up affected pods and compost them. Healthy plants may produce a second crop if dry weather returns in time. To prevent, make sure plants get good air circulation and plenty of sun to dry quickly after rains. Use mulch. Avoid watering from overhead; water at soil level.</p>
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WIT AND WISDOM

- If a girl finds nine peas in a pod, the next bachelor she meets will become her husband.
- According to folklore, St. Patrick's Day is the traditional day for planting peas (in many regions).
- Legend has it that the phrase “green thumb” originated during the reign of King Edward I of England, who was fond of green peas and kept six serfs shelling them during the season. The serf who had the greenest thumb won a prize!
- Peas have also been used for genetic research! Gregor Mendel conducted several experiments with this vegetable. According to [PennState](#), “In the mid-1800s, he conducted a number of experiments using garden peas at the monastery where he lived. He selected peas for his

one season. His research produced the Mendel Laws of Inheritance: The Law of Dominance, The Law of Segregation, and The Law of Independent Assortment. This was groundbreaking scientific work. His laws also apply to human genetics."

RECIPES

CREAM OF GREEN PEA SOUP

GINGERED BEEF, SNOW PEAS, AND CARROTS

GREEN PEA WALNUT PESTO

PEAS AND EGG FRIED RICE

PAPA'S SUGAR PEA AND VEGGIE MEDLEY

COOKING NOTES

Ideally, peas should be used when freshly picked as they rapidly toughen and will lose their sweetness.

Green peas can be eaten raw as a snack or in salads. Peas are also excellent in pasta, soups, casseroles, stir-fries, and sautés. Cooking times vary greatly depending on when the green peas were harvested. Young, small ones require less cooking than older, starchy ones.

To steam, put 1 inch of water in a pot, bring to a boil, place a steaming basket in the pan, slowly add peas to the steaming basket, and cover with a lid. Steam for about 2 minutes.

Or, to microwave, put 2 tablespoons of water in a microwavable dish and cover. Microwave on high, checking every 2 minutes for doneness. Add butter and salt as desired.

Interestingly, the pea tendrils are also edible! Harvest these young pea shoots when they are 12 to 18 inches out of the ground. As with peas, eat the tender shoots soon after harvesting. Add to salads or into stir-fries at the end of cooking.

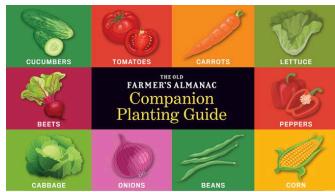
VEGETABLES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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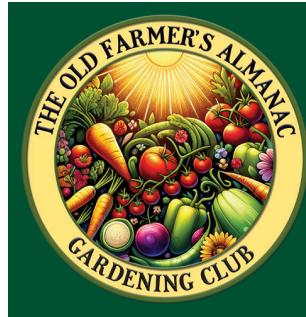
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COMMENTS

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Liane (not verified) 7 months 3 weeks ago

I grow snow peas, eating them as they grow, right in the garden. Friends come to chat, we go out and feast on snow peas while catching up. Much better than cookies.

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The Editors 7 months 3 weeks ago

So delicious! We'll come visit anytime!

REPLY

Linda Lillie (not verified) 2 years 2 months ago

To shell peas more easily, blanch first then shell them. They pop right out of the shells very easily and fast.

REPLY

Belinda (not verified) 3 years 2 months ago

What about southern peas? Black eye, purple hull, etc? I know they're more a warm weather crop but what about planting by the moon??

REPLY

George King (not verified) 11 months 3

weeks ago

Cream 40 field peas need help to grow.

How many days to harvest?

REPLY

Anne (not verified) 3 years 2 months ago

I grow sweet peas for the flowers & peas; Bees like pea blossoms; pea blossoms are pretty~

REPLY

Pat (not verified) 3 years 2 months ago

Snow, munch, sugar snap every March. Zone7 they never make it into the house  

REPLY

Jane Stewart (not verified) 3 years 9 months ago

Hi, I've been picking my snow peas for a month now and most grew this last week. I picked a few that are developed inside but still in pod. Can I use these for planting next year? I know I should have left them on the vine. Can I let them dry and use or just eat them now?

REPLY

Billy mcgarvey (not verified) 8 months

2 weeks ago

I would like also to know can I use left

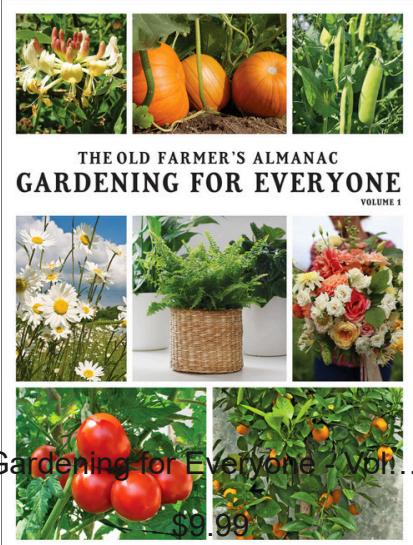
[REPLY](#)

Len (not verified) 4 years 1 month ago

When I studied Biology we were taught that the seeds or seed coverings (the sexual reproduction part of the plant was fruit as opposed to roots, stems and leaves. Question: Why is a pea not a fruit, but a vegetable?

[REPLY](#)[MORE COMMENTS](#)

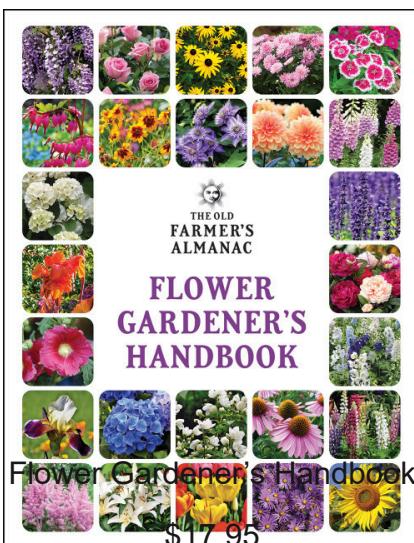
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