

LIMA BEAN

Gardening tips provided by
Jefferson Farm & Gardens

Overview

Lima bean, *Phaseolus lunatus*, is a warm season vegetable of the legume family and is closely related to green beans, kidney beans, and wax beans. The lima bean has been grown in Peru since 6000 BC and was named after its capital city, Lima. Lima beans are also nicknamed butter beans or chad beans. The lima bean is a good source of cholesterol-lowering fiber and protein.

Choosing Varieties

There are many varieties of lima beans available that differ in days till maturity, growth habit, and disease resistance, as well as other traits. Lima beans can be characterized by their growth habit (bush or pole) or seed size (baby or large). A few recommended varieties for Missouri and other Midwest states are:

Bush

- Fordhook 242 (heavy yielder, large seeds)
- Henderson's (early, baby lima)
- Thorogreen Early (hardy, tall, baby lima)

Pole

- Christmas (large white seeds with red mottles)
- King of the Garden (vigorous, large seeds)

It is recommended to try a few varieties to determine overall plant performance and personal preference.

Planting Tips

The lima bean is a warm season vegetable that performs poorly in cool, wet weather.

In Missouri, seeds can be sown in mid-to-late May after the soil has warmed and the threat of a frost has passed. Seeds can be planted about 1 inch deep and 2-4 inches apart and about 2 feet between rows for bush beans. For pole beans, seeds can be planted in rows about 4-6 inches apart along a trellis or fence. Hills can be planted with 6-8 seeds that are about 3 feet apart in rows about 30 inches apart. A teepee structure can be made with 4 poles involving 2 hills from two adjoining rows. Sowing instructions for a particular variety can usually be found on the seed packet.



To extend the harvesting season of lima beans, plant repeatedly every 2-3 weeks until mid-summer.

Poor or uneven germination can result from seeds being planted too deeply so that the emerging seedlings cannot break through the soil's surface. Soil crusting can occur after a heavy rain, especially if the topsoil contains clay. Soil crusting can be prevented by mulching the rows with sawdust, pine needles, or grass clippings.

Soil Fertility and Pest Control

Legumes such as lima beans are able to produce or "fix" their own nitrogen when the right soil microorganisms are present. If lima beans have not been grown in the garden before, an inoculum (dried rhizobium organism) can be sprinkled on the seeds or seedrow, otherwise the lima beans may benefit from some nitrogen fertilizer. Lima beans benefit from watering during a dry spell, but they cannot tolerate waterlogged soil.

Bean leaf beetles are a common pest of lima beans and can be controlled with chemicals containing the organic compound pyrethrin (be sure to follow product labels).

The bean mosaic diseases cause lima bean plants to have mottled yellow leaves and produce few pods. To prevent these diseases, mosaic-resistant varieties should be grown. To prevent root rot, create raised beds to improve drainage, plant resistant varieties, and rotate legume plantings with other crops each year.

Harvesting

Lima beans should be harvested when the seed pods have filled out but are still green and tender. If left on the plant after maturity, they become tough skinned and mealy. Bush lima beans can typically be harvested in 2-3 pickings, while

pole lima beans will continue to produce if the mature pods are removed. Lima beans can be harvested as dry beans by waiting until the seed pods dry and crack open before collecting. Lima beans should be thoroughly cooked before eating, as fresh lima beans contain a toxic material that is destroyed by cooking.

Seed Sources

Seeds can be ordered from mail order companies via phone or website. Burpee Seeds (1-800-888-1447, burpee.com) and Vermont Bean Seed Company (1-800-349-1071, vermontbean.com) are two companies that sell lima bean varieties.

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