

PEANUT

Gardening tips provided by
Jefferson Farm & Gardens



Overview

The peanut, *Arachis hypogaea*, is a warm season vegetable of the legume family and is related to soybeans, lentils, and peas. In 1890 an unknown St. Louis physician created peanut butter by pulverizing peanuts with a hand-cranked meat grinder. The peanut paste was created as a healthy protein substitute for the elderly, who often had a hard time chewing meat. Peanuts are rich in protein and vitamin E.

Choosing Varieties

There are different varieties of peanuts available that differ in days till maturity, growth habit, and number of seeds per pod, as well as other traits. A few available varieties are:

- Carolina Black (black skinned)
- Jumbo Virginia (extra-large peanuts)
- Tennessee Red Valencia (early, 2-5 nuts/pod)

Peanuts are one of the few types of produce that can be planted with success when purchased from the grocery store. Undamaged, unroasted peanuts should be used.

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

Planting Tips

The peanut is a warm season vegetable and performs poorly in cool, wet weather.

In Missouri, seeds can be sown in early to late May after the soil temperatures have reached 65° F. Peanuts with thicker pods should be shelled and the seeds should be planted individually. If seeds are split or damaged, they will not germinate. Peanut seeds should be planted 1-1.5 inches deep about 2 inches apart in rows about 3 feet apart. Once the seedlings emerge, they can be thinned to a spacing of about 6-8 inches. Seeds can be planted in raised beds to improve soil drainage. Sowing instructions for a particular variety can be found on the seed packet.

After the flowers are fertilized, the fruiting pegs elongate and bend toward the soil. They then enter the loose soil and form shelled nuts. If necessary, 2-3 inches of loose soil can be mounded around the plant to give the forming

peanuts more room and keep them near the soil surface.

Soil Fertility and Pest Control

Peanuts need a loose well-drained soil for proper formation of the shelled nuts. Heavier soils containing clay can be amended with compost. Legumes such as peanuts are able to produce or “fix” their own nitrogen when the right soil microorganisms are present. If peanuts have not been grown in the garden before, an innoculum (dried *Rhizobium* organism) can be sprinkled on the seeds or seedrow, otherwise the peanuts may benefit from some nitrogen fertilizer.

Peanuts grown in a home garden have relatively few pests. Diseases can be prevented by providing adequate soil drainage through raised beds. To prevent root-knot nematode damage, legume plantings should be rotated with other crops each year.

Harvesting

The entire plant should be dug in the fall after the foliage has turned yellow, but before a hard freeze. The plant should then be hung in a warm, dry place such as a garage. After a week, the residual soil should be shaken from the plant, and the individual peanuts can then be removed. The peanuts should be allowed to cure in mesh bags in a cool dry place for several weeks. Afterwards, the peanuts can be shelled and eaten or roasted.

Seed Sources

Seeds can be ordered from mail order companies via phone or website. Burpee Seeds (1-800-888-1447, burpee.com) and Southern Exposure Seed Exchange (1-540-894-9480, southernexposure.com) are two companies that sell peanut varieties.

Written by Catherine Bohnert, Horticulture Specialist. Additional guidesheets at www.jeffersonfarm.org. Copyright 2008.