

# PEAS

Gardening tips provided by  
Jefferson Farm & Gardens

## Overview

Peas, *Pisum sativum*, are a cool season vegetable of the pea family and are closely related to peanuts, beans, and chickpeas. Thomas Jefferson was quite fond of the English or garden pea and planted up to 19 varieties. According to family accounts, Jefferson held annual pea competitions among his friends to see who could grow the earliest crop of peas. The winner would host a dinner featuring the freshly harvested peas. Peas are a good source of protein and dietary fiber.

## Choosing Varieties

There are a many varieties of peas available that differ in days till maturity, height, and disease resistance, as well as other traits. Peas can be categorized by the time it takes for the crop to mature or by the way the pea is used. A few recommended varieties for Missouri and other Midwest states are:

### English/Garden Peas

- Alaska (very early, heirloom)
- Lincoln (compact vines, heirloom)
- Wando (somewhat heat resistant)

### Snap Peas

- Sugar Ann (early, does not need support)
- Sugar Snap (needs trellising, pods are sweet)
- Super Sugar Snap (powdery mildew resistant)

### Snow Peas

- Dwarf Grey Sugar (red flowers, small pods)
- Oregon Giant (high yields)

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

## Planting Tips

Peas are a cool season vegetable that do poorly in hot weather. They can be spring or fall planted.

In Missouri, seeds can be sown in late March to early April in the spring or for a fall crop, heat tolerant varieties can be planted in mid to late summer. Seeds can be planted ½-1 inch deep and anywhere from 1 inch to 4 inches apart



in single or double rows. Spacing between the single or double rows can be 18-24 inches. Sowing instructions for a particular variety can usually be found on the seed packet.

Vining varieties of peas will need to be trellised. One trellising techniques includes using small sticks that are 2-4 feet long and placed in the ground along the row. Another method is attaching chicken wire or string between two poles at either end of the row.

## Soil Fertility and Pest Control

Legumes such as peas are able to produce or “fix” their own nitrogen when the right soil microorganisms are present. If peas have not been grown in the garden before, an inoculum (dried rhizobium organism) can be sprinkled on the seeds or seedrow; otherwise the peas may benefit from some nitrogen fertilizer.

To prevent weeds, retain moisture, and to keep soil temperatures down, mulch can be applied around the plants. Pea plants would benefit from watering if grown during a dry spring or fall.

Aphids are a common pest of peas and can be controlled with insecticidal soaps (be sure to follow product labels).

Powdery mildew appears as a white fungus on leaves and then causes leaf yellowing and defoliation. Sulfur can be used to treat powdery mildew. To prevent diseases like fusarium wilt and root rot, create raised beds to improve drainage, plant resistant varieties, and rotate legume plantings with other crops each year.

## Harvesting

For the best taste, peas should be harvested according to their type. English or garden peas should be harvested when pods have filled, but are not bulging. Only the pea

should be eaten. Snap peas should be picked when the pods have started to fill, but are not too large. The pods should snap like green beans and the entire pod can be eaten. Snow peas should be harvested when the pod reaches mature length but before peas form.

### **Seed Sources**

Seeds can be ordered from mail order companies via phone or website. Johnny's Selected Seeds (1-877-564-6697, johnnyseeds.com) and Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds (1-417-924-8917, rareseeds.com) are two companies that sell pea varieties.

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