

SNAP BEANS

Gardening tips provided by
Jefferson Farm & Gardens



Overview

The snap bean, *Phaseolus vulgaris*, is a warm season vegetable of the legume family and is related to soybeans, lentils, and peas. Early varieties of beans had a fibrous string along the pod, giving rise to the name string bean. That string has since been bred out of the modern bean varieties. Snap bean is now a common name for the beans, which came from the snapping sound the beans made when broken. The snap bean is a good source of dietary fiber and protein.

Choosing Varieties

There are many varieties of snap beans available that differ in days till maturity, growth habit, color, and disease resistance, as well as other traits. Snap beans can be grouped by growth habit (pole or bush) or by color of pods (green, yellow, and purple). A few recommended varieties for Missouri and other Midwest states are:

Green

- Bush Blue Lake 274 (disease resistant)
- Contender (early, heat tolerant, bush)
- Derby (disease resistant, high yields, bush)
- Kentucky Wonder (flavorful, pole)

Purple

- Purple King (shiny 5-6" pods, pole)
- Purple Queen (green when cooked, bush)
- Royal Purple Burgundy (rich flavor, bush)

Yellow (Wax)

- Gold Mine (high yields, bush)
- Golden Rod (disease resistant, bush)
- Kentucky Wonder Wax (high yields, pole)

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

Planting Tips

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

In Missouri, seeds can be sown in early May to June after the soil temperatures have reached 70°F. Seeds should be

planted no more than 1 inch deep and about 1 inch apart with about 2 feet between rows for bush beans. Once the seedlings emerge, they can be thinned to a spacing of about 3 inches. Pole beans can be spaced 6-10 inches apart in a row along a trellis or planted several to a hill and trained on a 6-8 foot pole or stake. Sowing instructions for a particular variety can usually be found on the seed packet.

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, straw, or grass clippings.

Soil Fertility and Pest Control

Legumes such as snap beans are able to produce or "fix" their own nitrogen when the right soil microorganisms are present. If snap beans have not been grown in the garden before, an inoculum (dried rhizobium organism) can be sprinkled on the seeds or seedrow, otherwise the snap beans may benefit from some nitrogen fertilizer. Snap beans will drop blossoms in hot, dry weather and benefit from watering during a dry spell. However, they will not set pods in waterlogged soil. As a legume, snap beans benefit from a near neutral soil pH.

There are a variety of insects that feed on pods, usually causing only cosmetic damage, but if there is an infestation, they can be controlled by chemicals containing the organic compound pyrethrin (be sure to follow product labels). Aphids can be controlled with insecticidal soaps.

Possible diseases include root rot, bacterial blight (necrotic spots on leaves), and mosaic virus (mottling of leaves). To prevent these diseases, use disease-resistant varieties, improve soil drainage with raised beds, and rotate legume plantings with other crops.

Harvesting

Snap beans should be monitored as the pods start to elongate and fill out. Harvest when the pods are firm, crisp and slender, before the seeds fully develop. Snap beans lose flavor and become stringy if left after maturity. Be careful not to injure stems while harvesting because the bean plant will continue to produce more pods as long as the mature pods are picked.

Seed Sources

Seeds can be ordered from mail order companies via phone or website. Burpee Seeds (1800-888-1447, burpee.com) and Vermont Bean Seed Company (1-800-349-1071, vermontbean.com) are two companies that sell snap bean varieties.

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