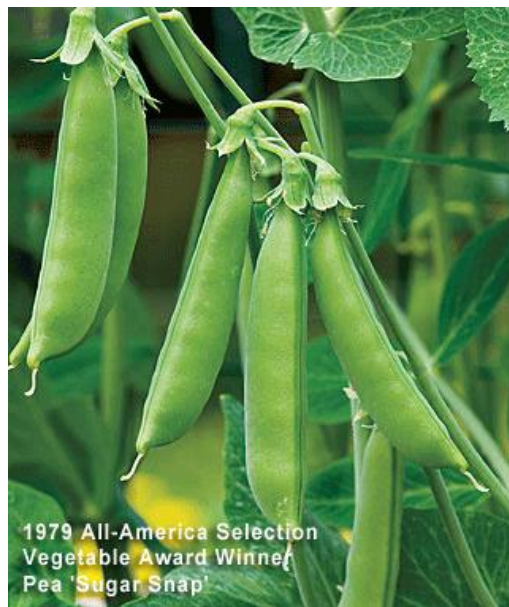


## Peas Love Cool Weather. Plant Soon For A Spring Crop!

Peas are frost tolerant and germinate best in cool soil, so they should be planted in very early spring as soon as your garden soil is workable. Optimum soil temperature for pea germination is 40 to 70° F. If the soil is too cold (below 40 degrees), seeds take much longer to germinate and may rot. If soil temperatures are too high, germination stops.

Check soil temperature reports for your location from the Nebraska State Climate Office online at Nebraska Extension's Hort Update website, (<http://hortupdate.unl.edu>.) Soil temperatures should be perfect later this week for planting peas.

There are three types of peas and the difference among them lies in the way you eat them. The types are English peas, snow peas, and snap peas. Botanically, they all are varieties of *Pisum sativum* (Pie-sum suh-tie-vum) and belong to the legume family, as do beans. *Pisum* comes from the Latin for pea; *sativum* refers to cultivated. Snow peas, grown in Asia for centuries and always popular for their flat, edible pods, are *P. sativum var. macrocarpon*. Snap peas, such as the original 'Sugar Snap,' may be the result of a fortuitous, natural cross between snow peas and English peas.



### Growing Peas

To grow peas in your vegetable garden, select a site in full sun, one that receives at least six hours of direct sun daily. Peas grow well in almost any kind of soil but they do best in a fertile, somewhat sandy soil with good drainage. They prefer a soil with a neutral or slightly alkaline pH. Improve the soil, if necessary, before sowing by digging to a depth of 6 to 8 inches and incorporating organic matter, such as compost or aged manure. Be sparing with the manure because too much nitrogen encourages more leaf production than pods.

The best way to grow peas is to sow seed directly into prepared garden soil. For a longer harvest, sow a succession of seeds every one to two weeks until around the middle of May. Or you can save yourself that task by planting early, midseason, and late varieties all at once. Refer to the seed packet for information on plant spacing and planting depth. Peas can also easily be grown in containers, for those lacking space for a vegetable garden.

Here are some tips on growing peas :

- i. To maintain a cool and moist soil after planting, cover the surface with a layer of straw, compost, or leaves; run a mower over the latter to chop them up before applying.
- ii. Peas are light feeders. If you want to fertilize, do so sparingly and use a fertilizer low in nitrogen.
- iii. Almost all plants require at least an inch of water weekly. When you water (if nature fails to take care of that chore), water deeply, preferably with a soaker hose or drip irrigation system. Plants are most drought sensitive when they are flowering and producing pods. As the temperatures rise towards midsummer, you may need to water almost daily.
- iv. Aside from the ubiquitous rabbits, and other four-footed creatures, the only bothersome pest is aphids. Wash aphids off the plants as soon as you notice them with a hard spray of water from a garden hose. If they get a head start on you, use an insecticidal soap spray. The most troublesome disease is powdery mildew, although other possible diseases sometimes present problems -- Fusarium wilt and root rot, for example. Prevention is the best defense. Plant resistant varieties (seed packets provide this information), plant early, and rotate your crops on a three-year cycle so you do not plant peas in the same bed each year.

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- v. Prepare for the cooler and wetter weather of autumn by sowing a fall crop around mid July through early August. Sow the seeds thickly at least 2 inches deep and keep the bed well watered.

### **Harvesting**

While all three pea types need the same growing conditions, the harvesting and eating differ. To produce English peas or shelling peas, gardeners allow the peas in the pod to fully ripen. The pea pods with plump, round peas are opened, removing the peas. The act of removing the peas is called shelling. The peas are then cooked without the pod. How do you know if the crop is ready to harvest? Judge by color and touch. For English peas, look for nicely rounded, bright green pods that feel velvety and show the peas (called berries) inside beginning to swell. If the pod is dull green and the peas make definite, large ridges on the pod, the peas have passed their prime.

The snow pea is harvested when the peas inside the pod are immature. The entire snow pea pod is eaten either cooked or quickly stir-fried. Many snow pea varieties are available. 'Mammoth Melting Sugar' is a popular old-fashioned variety with wilt resistance. The fast growing plants produce sugar-sweet pods in 72 days. For snow peas, harvest before the peas begin to fill the pod.

The snap pea can be harvested when the peas are immature (like the snow pea) and eaten raw or cooked. The snap pea is more versatile because if the immature pods are left on the vine and peas form inside, the pod can be harvested, shelled, and the peas eaten like an "English pea." In spite of its maturity the pod is still tender and tasty so that the entire pod and peas can be eaten. Pick snap peas anytime. There is little wasted when growing snap peas.

To harvest, pick carefully. Grasp the vine in one hand and pinch the pod off with the other, so you do not damage the plant in the process. Harvest frequently -- every other day when the crop starts maturing -- to keep the vines producing new pods, increasing your yield. Harvest just before using, if possible, because the sugars turn quickly to starch. Shell English peas when you are ready to prepare them, not in advance. Like other vegetables, peas begin to lose their nutritive value when cooked in water, so steam or stir-fry them instead.

### **Storage & Freezing**

Peas taste best fresh, but they also freeze well for winter storage. To freeze English peas, shell them as soon as you pick them (discard pods); then blanch the peas for one to two minutes in boiling water, drain, and dip in ice water to stop the cooking process. Drain again and store in plastic bags or containers in the freezer. Consume them within six to seven months. Wash snow peas and snap peas; remove any strings if necessary. Then blanch and freeze as above.

For more information on choose vegetable cultivars for Nebraska gardens, refer to:  
Selected Vegetable Cultivars for Nebraska, <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendlt/g1896.pdf>

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