

# GROWING PEAS

**The vegetable herald of spring. The legume so delicious, only half a harvest will ever make it back to the kitchen. The crop that gives back to the soil as much as it takes out. They can be a bit finicky to grow, but isn't it worth giving peas a chance?**

Peas have been a staple in our diet since prehistoric times. It is likely that they were first cultivated in Turkey, where seeds found in archaeological digs have been dated at around 7 500 years old.

Peas are rich in fibre and vitamins A and C, a significant source of folic acid, potassium and vitamins K and B1 and help reduce some harmful forms of cholesterol.

In gardening terms, peas can be broadly divided into field peas, traditional garden peas, sugar snaps and snow peas. Field peas are grown mostly for their dried seeds which are used for animal fodder and in soups and other dishes. The pod of the garden pea is discarded in favour of tender immature seeds.

## Site and soil

Peas will do best in a well-drained, moderately rich soil. Because they come with their own supply of nitrogen, the soil doesn't need to be nitrogen-rich. For this reason, peas can be planted after a 'greedy' crop. Try not to plant peas after beans (in the same bed), to avoid transfer of similar pests. A sunny position is preferable and a fair bit of garden is required to grow enough plants for a decent yield.

## Planting

Sow seeds to a depth of 5cm (or a little deeper in warmer weather) at intervals of around 10cm. Rows should be spaced between 50-90cm apart, depending on variety - dwarf varieties need more space as they have a broader form than climbing and tall varieties.

To avoid seed rot, plant seeds in moist soil (preferably in temperatures above 5°C) and don't water until germination occurs. Only mulch around strong seedlings, and keep mulch away

from stems. A cloche may be used to protect tender seedlings. Bush or dwarf varieties generally support themselves, but for most other varieties, some type of trellis or stake will help productivity, air circulation and harvest. Feed with Talborne Organics 6:3:4 or 3:1:5.

Peas prefer cool weather. If you are planning to plant peas in warmer months, they'll be happier in a spot in the garden with a bit of shade.

## Varieties of Peas

Peas are easy enough to grow. The most difficult part of growing peas is choosing what kind you want to grow.

*There are basically three types of peas:*

*English peas, Snow peas, and Sugar snap peas.*

Once you get the differences clear, you will probably want to grow some of each. Take a look at your choices.

*English peas*, garden peas, or sweet peas generally refer to the same thing and are the spherical variety often found frozen that many of us grew up chasing around our dinner plates.

They grow in pods that are too fibrous to ingest, thus they are shelled and the pods discarded. The peas are starchy and sweet and just about as versatile as produce can get. Enjoy them raw or cooked, in everything from salads, to quiches, to pastas. Utilize them whole, or puree them for baby food, soups, sauces, or dips.

*Snow peas* are an edible-podded variety that appear flat and almost translucent. Technically, the pods are unripe, and the visible peas within the pod are clearly immature and not yet spherical.



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The pods themselves don't contain any non-digestible fiber, and therefore are consumed in their entirety. The flavor is mild and slightly sweet, though more vegetal and bright in character than English peas. Enjoy them just as they come for a healthy snack, chopped in a fresh salad, or in their most common and highly tasty application, a savory Chinese stir-fry.



**Snap peas**, or sugar snap peas, are evidence that it is genetically possible to get the best traits out of both parents. They exist as the result of crossing a shelled pea variety with snow peas. The pods are rounder than snow peas and more closely resemble the pods of English peas, but are fully edible, with a medium-sweet flavor.

Enjoy them as you would snow peas, though they are especially delightful in their purest state.

### Best Companion Plants for Garden Peas

Companion planting can be defined as the close planting of different species based on their ability to enhance one another's growth or offer some form of pest protection or other advantages.

Sometimes this is a matter of choosing plants with different growth habits that do not compete with one another or those that have different nutrient needs that make efficient use of soil.

Peas and other legumes, like beans, are good companion plants for many other vegetables since they increase the availability of nitrogen in the soil.

For peas, the best companion plants are the ones that share their care requirements, as well as help them grow better and use your gardening space more efficiently.

Harvest time does not need to be the same. Beans, Carrots, Celery, Corn, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Peppers, Radishes, Spinach, Tomatoes, Turnips.

### Plants to Avoid Planting Near Peas

Plants in the allium (onion and garlic) family are not good partners for peas because they tend to stunt the growth of peas. Avoid planting these plants near peas: Onions, Garlic, Leeks, Shallots, Scallions, Chives

### Storing Peas

As with most vegetables, peas from the garden are best when they are freshly picked. If you cannot use them right away, they will keep in the refrigerator for about five days. If you want to store them longer, freezing is the best option. Peas can also be dried for long-term storage. They lose some flavor but still can make a tasty addition to Winter soups and stews.

### Looking for reci-pea?

Try **Bruschetta with smashed peas, mint and parmesan... yummy!**



1/2 baguette, cut diagonally into sixteen x 10mm thick slices

3 tbsp olive oil, divided

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

1/4 cup finely chopped sweet onion

1 1/4 cups blanched refreshed peas

1/4 cup finely grated Parmesan

10 fresh mint leaves + more for garnish

2 tsp freshly squeezed lemon juice

- 1) Preheat the oven to 200°C
- 2) On a baking sheet, arrange the bread slices in a single layer.
- 3) Brush one side of each slice with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Toast the bread in the oven until the slices are golden brown, +-10 min; set aside.
- 4) Meanwhile, in a small skillet set over medium heat, add the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil and the onion. Cook, stirring often, until the onion is soft and translucent.
- 5) Transfer the onion to a food processor; add the peas, Parmesan, mint leaves and lemon juice and process until well blended but still chunky.
- 6) Season to taste with salt and pepper. Top each toast with 1 tablespoon of the pea mixture and an extra mint leaf.
- 7) Serve.