Garden Peas

Garden peas (*Pisum sativum* L.) are cool-season crops that include the common green English pea and the edible-podded pea. English peas are shelled and only the seed eaten, whereas edible-podded peas are eaten whole. Edible-podded peas take two forms, the full-podded snap pea with large seeds and the flat-podded snow or sugar pea with undeveloped seeds. Wrinkled-seeded varieties of peas generally are sweeter than smooth-seeded varieties and are preferred for home use.

**Planting**

Garden peas are cool-weather plants that can withstand frosts and light freezes, although the blossoms cannot. The plants suffer in the heat and humidity of summer, so plant pea seeds as early in spring as the ground can be worked. Fall plantings are not recommended. Early and mid-season varieties are recommended for South Carolina. Plant in full sun to ensure maximum flavor and sugar content.

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<th>Region</th>
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<tr>
<td>Piedmont</td>
<td>February 1-15</td>
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<td>Central</td>
<td>January 20 - 30</td>
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<td>Coastal</td>
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Sow pea seeds 1 to 1½ inches deep and 1 to 2 inches apart in single, double, or wide rows. A single row consists of seeds sown in a straight line, whereas a double row consists of a set of 2 single rows spaced 2 to 4 inches apart. A wide row ranges between 6 and 18 inches in width, with the seeds broadcast in the row rather than sown in straight lines. The width of a hoe blade makes a convenient row width for garden peas. Regardless of row type planted, space rows 2 feet apart.

Peas are legumes and use *Rhizobium* bacteria that live in nodules along the root system to take up nitrogen from the air and convert it to a useable form. To increase the numbers of these helpful bacteria, especially in newly planted ground, pea seeds can be treated with *Rhizobium leguminosarum* biovar *viceae*. The bacteria can be purchased as a wettable powder that is applied to the moistened seed before planting, or in a granular form that is applied over the seeds in the row.

Pea plants, even dwarf varieties, benefit from some type of support, so provide netting, trellis, wires, or pea brush for the tendrils to cling to. Pea brush
consists of branched shrub prunings inserted into the row for support of the climbing pea plants. Erect the support system before or immediately after planting seeds to avoid disturbing the roots of germinating and established plants.

**Recommended Cultivars**

- English peas – Alaska, Mr. Big, Maestro, Wando (heat tolerant), Lincoln (heat tolerant)
- Edible-podded peas, snap - Super Sugar Snap, Sugar Sprint, Early Snap
- Snow or sugar peas - Snowbird, Oregon Sugar Pod II, Dwarf Gray Sugar

**Fertilizing**

A soil test is always the best method of determining the fertilization needs of the crop. Information on soil testing is available in the fact sheet [HGIC 1652, Soil Testing](https://www.ars.usda.gov/our-science/publications). Follow the results of a soil test to maintain a soil pH between 6.0 and 6.5 and optimal fertility levels. If a soil test has not been taken, make a preplanting application of 5-10-10 fertilizer at 3 pounds per 100 square feet. Do not over-fertilize with nitrogen as it will reduce pea pod production.

**Watering**

In the absence of adequate rainfall, water the garden to provide an even supply of moisture to the pea crop. Peas should be watered in the early morning so that the foliage will be dry before dark. Always water plants sufficiently to moisten the soil to a depth of 6 inches, as light sprinklings will encourage shallow rooting of the plants. The critical period for moisture is during pod set and development.

**Cultural Practices**

Organic matter added to the soil during garden preparation will help loosen clay soils and help retain moisture in sandy soils.

Planting in wide rows allows the pea plants to cling together and support each other. It also helps shade the plants’ roots and keep them cool.

Mulch plants with 2 to 3 inches of organic material, such as shredded leaves or pine straw. This will help keep pea plant roots cool, prevent moisture loss and suppress weeds.

**Harvesting & Storage**

Early varieties are ready to harvest in 55 to 64 days, mid-season varieties in 65 to 70 days. Pods on the lower portion of the plant mature first. Harvest pods every 1 to 3 days for peak quality.
the ground. Use two hands, one to support the plant and the other to detach the pod.

The sugar in peas quickly converts to starch, so eat, freeze or can as soon as possible after harvest to ensure maximum flavor. Fresh peas can be stored unwashed for 2 to 3 days in the refrigerator.

Problems
Common diseases and insect pests include powdery mildew, Fusarium wilt, aphids and viruses spread by aphids. The Recommended Cultivars listed above are generally disease resistant.

Prepared by Frances R. Knight, Clemson Extension Master Gardener, and S. Cory Tanner, Horticultural Extension Agent, Greenville County, Clemson University Cooperative Extension, Clemson University, 2010.

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