



Ventura Garden to Table Series – Beans

Beans are in the *Fabaceae* family, are high in protein. They need a lot of sun (minimum 6 hours), bush varieties are good for containers, and young leaves and stems are edible.

One thing all of these plants have in common is their remarkable ability to fix their own nitrogen from the air through a partnership with beneficial soil bacteria called Rhizobia - making legumes not just a food crop, but a soil-building one as well.

Cross-Pollination Concerns

- Only varieties of the same species can cross with each other.
- Current season fruits/vegetables remain true to type.
- Next generation effects - most beans self-pollinate, however, runner beans are more prone to cross-pollination.

Bean Types and Varieties to Consider

There are 2 main bean types – shell and snap and there are varieties for cool season (fava and peas) and warm season (“green” beans, both bush and pole).

- Fresh Beans - snap bean varieties - cultivated mainly for their pods.
- Dried Beans – shell (or runner) can be eaten both fresh and dried.

Bean Family Basics and Varieties to consider

- **Common Beans** - kidney, cranberry, pink, black, white, yellow, pinto, red, and "green" beans If you only grow one thing in your garden, make it a common bean - they are easy, productive, and come in bush or pole varieties to fit any space. Varieties – see below.
- **Lima Beans** – love heat and a long growing season, making Ventura County's climate nearly perfect for them, though be patient - they take longer to mature than common beans. Varieties – Fordhook 242 (bush, heat tolerant) and King of the Garden (pole type, big harvest).
- **Chickpeas** - are a wonderful low-water crop for our dry climate, but plan ahead - each plant produces only a small number of pods, so you'll need a generous patch to get a meaningful harvest. Varieties – Sierra (developed in California) and Kala Chana (very drought tolerant).
- **Lentils** - thrive in cool weather and poor soil, making them an ideal fall or winter crop here, but like chickpeas, you'll need a good amount of space to harvest enough for the kitchen. Varieties - Pardina (Spanish brown lentil, reliable and compact) and Crimson Chief (red lentil, fast maturing).
- **Peas** - Peas are one of the most rewarding cool-season crops for Ventura gardeners - plant them in October or November and you'll be picking sweet pods right through the winter. Varieties – see below.
- **Fava Beans** - broad beans Favas are a Ventura County superstar - plant them in fall, let them grow through winter, and harvest a heavy crop in spring while most other gardens are still sleeping. Varieties - Aquadulce (classic long-season variety, perfect for our fall planting), Broad Windsor (large beans, very productive), and Crimson Flowered (beautiful ornamental AND edible).
- **Soybeans** - need consistent heat and humidity to perform well, so success can be hit or miss in our coastal climate, but gardeners in the warmer inland areas of the county are more likely to get a rewarding harvest. Varieties - Envy (edamame type, earlier maturing - your best bet for coastal areas), and Beer Friend (edamame, compact bush).
- **Peanuts** - are genuinely fun and surprising crop to grow - they prefer a long, hot season and loose sandy soil - and while they'll produce here, they are more of a novelty garden project than a serious food crop for most Ventura gardeners. Varieties - Valencia (shorter season, best choice for California gardens), Tennessee Red (good flavor, adapts to a range of soils).



Bush Bean Varieties

Short, erect plants that grow 1 to 2 feet tall (determinate growth) with a somewhat uniform pod set and long harvest.

- Green – Provider, and Blue Lake
- Yellow – Cherokee Wax, Goldrush and Slenderwax
- Purple – Purple Queen, Dragon Tongue, and Royal Burgundy

Pole Bean Varieties

Known as runner beans that climb and need staking or a trellis. Harvest young pods for the best flavor and texture. Before cooking, remove the stringy fiber running along the seam of the bean pod.

- Consider - Kentucky Blue, Blue Lake Pole, Kentucky Wonder Pole, and Rattlesnake

Peas

Peas are a cool-season crop that prefer our mild winters - plant seeds directly in the ground from October through January and avoid transplanting as they don't like having their roots disturbed.

- We can often get two plantings - an early fall planting for a winter harvest and a second planting in January for a spring harvest and before the warm weather arrives and signals the plants to stop producing.
- Shelling: 'Lincoln', 'Green Arrow'
- Snap: 'Sugar Snap' (the original - still the best), 'Super Sugar Snap'
- Snow: 'Oregon Sugar Pod'

Basic Care: QR code will take you to the Soil to Sprouts slide deck on the Ventura County Master Gardener website

- Seeds or Transplant – Transplants produce earlier harvest, look for multiple plants per pot.
- Mulch the Soil Surface – Apply a 3-4-inch layer of organic mulch.
- Watering – water deep - overhead watering can lead to diseases.
- Support - trellis, stake, or cage.
- Fertilizer – Use a General Purpose (10-10-10) fertilizer. High nitrogen fertilizer will increase green growth – not fruit.
- Using Raised Beds or Containers? – use potting soil or blend of compost/topsoil/vermiculite.



Harvesting:

- **Fresh Beans** - pick pods when they are still green and crisp. Bush beans produce most of their crops in a two-week period. Harvest often to keep plants producing.
- **Dried Beans** - allow the pods to mature fully on the plant until dry and brown, beans rattle when pod is shaken. Spread in a thin layer in a warm, well-ventilated area to completely dry before storing.

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