



## Healthy Garden Tips

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707-253-4221

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### GROWING PEAS

By Monica Finigan, UC Master Gardener of Napa County

#### KINDS TO PLANT

Pole and bush types are available. Bush peas have an earlier production period than pole peas, while the pole types yield more and produce longer. It is important to provide support for the climbing pole types. Peas vary from the shelling types, which are grown for their immature seeds, to the edible pod types. Included in the edible pod types are the snow peas which are harvested for their pods when the peas are just beginning to form, and the sugar snap peas which are picked when the pods are thick and filled with peas. Disease resistance varieties include Mammoth Melting Sugar and Oregon Sugar Pod II for snow types; Sugar Snap, Sugar Ann and Sugar Bon for sugar snap types; and Green Arrow for green garden shelling types.

#### REQUIREMENTS

Peas grow best in cool weather. They can be grown in part shade or full sun, but produce better yield in full sun. They can be planted in early spring as soon as the soil can be worked, or in late summer, 8 to 10 weeks before the first frost. Optimum growing temperatures are between 55° and 65° F. Peas can tolerate moderate frosts. Hot weather can adversely impact the yield and quality. Frequent rains and high humidity can make the edible pod types more prone to fungal diseases.

#### SOIL PREPARATION AND PLANTING

Peas have a low to moderate need for Nitrogen fertilizer; be careful not to over fertilize. Good drainage is essential. Planting seed directly in the soil is most successful because young pea seedlings are extremely sensitive to injury and do not transplant easily. Plant seeds 1 inch deep and 2 inches apart in a row. Low-growing bush varieties can be grown in rows 18 to 24 inches apart. Climbing types need 3 feet between rows. Use sturdy fencing to support the vines. Pea seeds germinate faster when the soil is warmer (60°F or higher.) Do not plant peas in the same place more than once every 4 years.

#### CARE AND HARVEST

Keep weeds down with frequent shallow cultivation. Stake pole peas when they start to vine. Although bush types can be grown without support, yield and quality generally improve with support. Peas require approximately 45 to 55 days from emergence to first harvest during the summer and 60 days or more. Harvest the edible pod types at the first sign of seed development. Pick frequently to prolong production. Eat peas soon after picking; cook shell peas soon after harvesting and shelling. Peas over mature quickly and the sugar content converts to starch rapidly. Overhead watering is not recommended, because it increases the occurrence of mildew. Remove plants after harvest or when leaves yellow and begin to drop. When plants get dry they quit growing for the season.

#### COMMON PROBLEMS

Birds can pull up seedlings. Seedlings get root rot in cold soil. Fusarium wilt. Powdery mildew. Aphids. Cucumber beetles. Consult UC IPM pest notes for management options.

#### TRICKS

Plant over several weeks to extend harvest. Use screens or other type of cover to keep birds from pulling up seedlings. Water regularly and early in the day so plants will dry as quickly as possible. Space plants to allow air circulation. Wait until soil temperature is at least 55°F before planting. When planting a fall crop, choose powdery-mildew-resistant varieties.

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