



## Harvest of the Month

# PEAS



## All About Peas— More Peas Please!

From their sweet taste and crunch to their incredible nitrogen-fixing abilities, there's so much to celebrate about this lovable legume.



## Botany

Peas (*Pisum sativum*) belong to the legume family and have notable significance beyond culinary purposes. Their ability to fix nitrogen in the soil, facilitated by their symbiotic relationship with nitrogen-fixing bacteria like *Rhizobium*, makes them valuable in agriculture for soil enrichment. This nitrogen-fixing process enhances soil fertility, benefiting subsequent crops in crop rotation systems. Additionally, peas, like other legumes, contribute to sustainable agricultural practices by reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers, thus promoting environmental conservation.

## Social Science

Peas are a type of legume native to the Middle East. Domestication of wild pea plants probably began with the dawn of agriculture itself, with carbonized pea remains showing up in Neolithic archeological sites in Turkey and Iraq (around 7,000 to 6,000 BCE), where they were likely companion plants to early-domesticated forms of wheat and barley.

From the Middle East peas spread rapidly to Europe. The early forms of pea, now called field peas, were probably cultivated to be eaten like a legume (that is, dried). The first finding of the garden pea (mostly grown to be eaten fresh, rather than dried) comes from Bronze Age archeological remains in Switzerland, around 3,000 BCE. The ancient Greeks and Romans also cultivated the garden pea, and from these areas the plant spread to India and China. Christopher Columbus purportedly brought peas to the West Indies on his infamous 1492 voyage; by the early 17th century, peas were cultivated in the early American settlement of Jamestown, Virginia. Plant breeder Calvin Lamborn developed the "sugar snap" variety in 1979 by crossing garden peas (now known as shelling peas) with snow peas. China is the top pea producing country in the world. The United States is a distant third behind China and India.

Guisantes means peas in Spanish.

## Nutrition

Peas are a nutrient superstar due to the fact they have protein in addition to ample fiber, antioxidants, magnesium, vitamin C, and more!

## Pro Pea Tip!

Every part of the pea plant is edible, from the shoots to the flowers to the sweet, crispy pods. If you're eager for peas but the plants need some time before producing, or if you have a lot of extra plants growing as a cover crop, try making a simple stir fry or salad out of tender pea shoots for that fresh Spring green flavor!

## Growing Tips



### Planting Preparation

Peas are a cool season crop that are the perfect school garden food. Plant them in August and September for a late autumn harvest. Plant them in October and they will overwinter for an early spring harvest. Then plant them again in early spring for an end of the school year harvest. well.

### Proper Spacing and Care:

Most pea varieties are climbers and will need to be trellised. Any fence will do, but they may still need some tying to encourage them to climb when they are young. Direct seed pea seeds 1-2" deep and approximately 6" apart. You can plant a little thicker and then thin to the proper spacing. If you carefully dig up the extra seedlings you can transplant them to areas of the row that didn't germinate well.



### Harvesting Tips:

Harvesting depends on the type of pea being grown. Snow peas should be harvested when the pods have sized up but before the peas inside start to mature. Snap peas should be harvested after the pods begin to swell and are nice and round. Don't pick too early because they won't be as sweet. Shell peas should be harvested when the peas inside the pod have completely filled the space. But don't wait too long to harvest as they will get tough.



## Cooking with Peas

Peas also go beautifully with other Spring garden harvests, and are especially delicious when paired with carrots, radishes, mint and lemon. Sugar snap peas need little preparation, and are many gardeners' favorite snack for their sweet fresh flavor and crunchy texture! On the other hand, shelling peas are well-suited for cooking. While you can add them raw to salads, they become especially delicious when used in a variety of dishes such as stews, soups, stir-fries, and even pestos or dips.

[For recipes visit SGN's Cooking From The Garden page](#)