



Peas a plenty

PIXABAY.COM

People love the tender and crunchy sugar snap peas. You can eat them pod and all.

Question: What are the recommended planting techniques for growing great peas in the Umpqua Valley?

Answer: Peas are native to Southern Europe and are known scientifically as *Pisum sativum*. They are a member of the legume family (Fabaceae). The legume family is the third largest in the plant kingdom. Among its members are trees, shrubs and vines, all of which produce beans sealed in pods.

Have you planted your peas yet? This is a question vegetable gardeners begin to hear about the middle of February. Peas are one of the first seeds you can put in the ground in February. They are best directly sown from seed, but they can also be grown from transplants.

There are essentially three kinds of peas. Pod peas, also called English peas or shelling peas, are those that, when fully mature, contain a row of peas that are delectable eaten right out of the pod or cooked. The pods must be opened and the peas shucked. When



Chris Rusch
Master Gardener

allowed to dry, they turn into dried peas and require a longer time in the pot.

Snow peas are flat edible pods that are picked and eaten before the peas begin to swell. They are also called Chinese peas, perhaps for their ubiquitous appearance in stir-fries.

The third type, sugar snap peas, is the in-between pea. They are fatter than a snow pea but not as plump as a pod pea. The vines are 5-6 feet tall and produce juicy, succulent pea pods for up to six weeks if picked often and the weather doesn't turn too hot. People love the tender and crunchy sugar snap peas. You can eat them pod and all.

All peas require full sun (at least six hours of direct sun), and well drained soil. A little afternoon shade in the height

of summer will help extend the season.

Mix 12 inches of compost into the planting area. If possible prepare beds the previous fall. Add an all-purpose fertilizer to the bottom of each planting row. Peas are best grown directly from seed, following the packet directions. Generally, place seeds 1 inch deep and between 1 and 3 inches apart.

Prior to planting, some gardeners like to soak the seeds overnight to soften the seed coat and encourage quicker germination. Some gardeners like to coat the seeds with an inoculant (powdered beneficial bacteria) prior to planting to encourage strong roots and higher yields by nitrogen fixing. Inoculants are live rhizobium bacteria and can be purchased along with your seed.

If you choose to plant starts (baby plants), gently loosen the roots but don't worry about separating out the individual plants. Peas like to grow in thick clumps. Water gently and deeply after sowing and keep the soil moist during germination. Then provide regular, deep watering.

Always provide support (a trellis, fence, etc.) for climbing pea varieties or try the dwarf and bush varieties that don't need any extra support. Pea plants do not need to be thinned.

Your pea plant will bear for about six weeks as long as you keep picking. Pea pods mature from the bottom of the plant upward, so that's where you want to start your harvest. Pick all the pods that are ready because if seeds are allowed to ripen, the plant will stop producing. You can extend your harvest with multiple plantings two to three weeks apart.

There are hundreds of varieties of peas. History has it that Thomas Jefferson alone grew thirty varieties at his gardens at Monticello. Here are a few recommendations for our region:

■ **Lincoln**, a shelling pod-pea, bears well and does better in warmer weather than most.

■ **Green Arrow** is an impressive shelling pod-pea, with disease resistance.

■ **Super Sugar Snap** sets plump pods, early in the season, delicious cooked or raw in salads.

■ **Sugar Ann** is an early, easy to grow snap pea, tender eating straight off the vine.

■ **Oregon Sugar Pod** is a snow pea developed by Oregon State University, sweet and disease resistant.

■ **Green Beauty** is a snow pea with tall lush vines that produce delicious 5 inch long pods.

■ **Little Snow Pea Purple**, topping out at 24 inches tall, is a dwarf snow pea with crispy pods. It is a prime candidate for container planting.

Gardeners are often grazers. We pluck and peel, snap and munch as we pass by our vegetables, especially peas.

There's still time to plant peas through the end of the month. Pea planting season starts in mid-February and runs through March in our region. Plant too early and seeds can rot; plant too late and plants can become heat stressed and succumb to disease. Now's the perfect time.

Do you have a gardening question? Please email the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmsg@oregonstate.edu.