DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
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University of Arkansas System

Agriculture and Natural Resources

FSA6073

Home Gardening Series

English Peas

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Vegetables

Environment

Light – sunny
Soil – loam
Fertility – medium to rich
pH – 6.0 to 7.0
Temperature – hardy, cool season
Moisture – average to moist

Culture

Planting – late summer and midwinter
Spacing – 1 x 24 inches
Hardiness – hardy
Fertilizer – light, nitrogen-fixing plant

Peas – *Pisum sativum*

Garden peas (also known as English peas) are native to the western parts of Asia. They were probably cultivated by the Greeks and Romans. Peas became important in the Middle Ages, and the first detailed description dates from the 16th century.

Peas are frost-hardy, cool-season vegetables that can be grown throughout Arkansas. The garden pea varieties have smooth or wrinkled seed. Smooth-seeded varieties tend to have more starch than the wrinkled-seeded varieties. The wrinkled-seeded varieties are generally sweeter and are usually preferred for home use. The southern pea (cowpea) is a warm-season vegetable of a different species that is planted and grown in the same manner as beans.

Cultural Practices

Planting Time

Peas thrive in cool, moist weather. Early planting usually produces larger yields than later plantings. Peas may be planted whenever the soil temperature is 45 degrees F or higher and when the soil is dry enough to till without sticking to garden tools.

Spacing and Depth of Planting

Plant peas 1 to 1 1/2 inches deep and 1 inch apart in single or double rows. Allow 18 to 24 inches between single rows and 10 to 18 inches between double rows.

Care

The germinating seed and small seedlings are easily injured by direct contact with fertilizer or improper cultivation. Cultivate and hoe shallowly during the early stage of growth. Most dwarf and intermediate pea varieties are self-supporting. The taller varieties (like 'Alderman') are

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Cultivars -

Crop	Cultivar	Days to Maturity	Disease Resistance or Tolerance	Remarks
English Peas	Little Marvel	62		Medium-sized dark green seed, good yield and quality, well adapted to home gardens.
	Wando	60		Medium-sized dark green seed, some heat tolerance.
	Dwarf Gray Sugar	65		Light green pods are edible.
	Sugar Snap	70		AAS winner. Produces edible pod and shelled peas.
	Oregon Sugar Pod II	68	MV, PM, FW (R)	Disease resistant, freezes well, no loss of color or flavor.
	Sugar Ann	56	FW (R)	AAS winner, medium-sized pods. Vines need no support.
	Sugar Sprint	58	PM (R), EV (T)	Stringless snap pea, great flavor. Vines need no support. Can be planted spring and fall.
	Mister Big	72	FW (T), PM (R)	AAS winner. Best large-podded, fall harvest type.

Abbreviations: **EV**: Enation Virus; **FW**: Fusarium Wilt; **MV**: Mosaic Virus; **PM**: Powdery Mildew; **(R)**: Resistant; **(T)**: Tolerant; **AAS**: All-America Selections®

more productive when trained to poles or to a fence for support and are more easily picked. Mulch to cool the soil, reduce moisture loss and minimize soil rots.

Harvesting

Garden Peas – When pea pods are swollen (appear round), they are ready to be picked. Pick a few pods every day or two near harvesttime to determine when peas are at the proper stage for eating. Peas are of best quality when they are immature and fully expanded but not hard and starchy. Peas should be picked immediately before cooking because their quality, like that of sweet corn, deteriorates rapidly. The pods on the lower portion of the plant mature the earliest. The last harvest (usually the third) is made about one week after the first. Pulling the entire plant for the last harvest makes picking easier. All the listed varieties, excellent as fresh peas, may be canned or frozen. Since hand-shelling is slow, some gardeners prefer the variety 'Alderman' because it contains more peas per pod than the other recommended varieties.

Edible Podded Peas – This variety is generally harvested before individual peas have grown to the size of BBs. Pods are usually picked five to seven days after flowering. They can be fried, stir-fried or steamed and mixed with ornamental vegetables or meat dishes. Remove pods missed in earlier pickings. Fibers along the edge of large pods, the stem and blossom end are removed during preparation. Peas will lose their crispness if overcooked. Pods have a high sugar content and will brown or burn quickly. Do not stir-fry over intense heat. Pea pods can be stored in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for two weeks. Unlike fresh green peas, pea pods deteriorate only slightly in quality when stored.

Winter Peas – Austrian winter pea is a type of English pea that is grown as a cover crop in the fall and winter. When grown as a green manure crop, winter peas help build soil fertility by fixing nitrogen and returning it to the soil.

Common Problems

The first signs of fusarium wilt and root-rot disease are yellowing and wilting of the lower leaves and stunting of the plant. Infection of older plants will usually result in the plant producing only a few poorly filled pods. These diseases are not prevalent on well-drained soils. Fusarium wilt can be avoided by growing wilt-resistant varieties.

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FSA6073-PD-6-11R

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