

Peas and beans are easy-to-grow backyard garden vegetables. Both like somewhat acidic soils. Most garden soils fall in this category (pH 6-6.5).

If you are planting a small amount of a large seed (like peas, beans, corn), you can speed up germination by soaking the seeds in room temperature or warm water overnight before planting. For good germination, peas like the soil temperature to be at least 10°C. Plant the seeds about 1 inch (2.5 cm) deep, 2 inches (5 cm) apart in rows that are spaced at least 30 inches (75 cm) apart. Peas are somewhat frost-hardy, and can usually withstand a light frost without permanent damage.

Peas like to climb. To keep the pods up out of the dirt, the plants need to be supported. Wire fencing, lattice, netting, all work well. Simply pushing cut branches and twigs into the ground will give the peas something to climb on.

Mature pea pods must be harvested regularly. Snow peas should be picked *before* the peas plump up. Snap and garden (sweet) peas should be picked as soon as the peas inside the pods have plumped up and the pod 'feels full'. Frequent harvesting will encourage the plants to produce more pods. Allowing the pods to over-mature will retard production, and the peas will be hard, woody and bitter, instead of the tender, juicy, sweet peas that you want. Snow and Snap peas are edible pod varieties, although Snap peas can be 'shucked'. Garden peas have fibrous pods and are typically 'shucked' (the pod is removed, with only the peas inside being eaten).

Green (string) or yellow (wax) beans are also easy to grow. These are typically a bush plant and do not require support. Pole type beans are the exception, they are climbers, and are a viable solution if you do not have a lot of garden space. Beans require warm soil (minimum 16°C) to germinate properly. Plant your seeds about 1 inch (2.5 cm) deep; 2-4 inches (5-10 cm) apart in rows about 24 inches (60 cm) apart. Beans are NOT frost hardy. Even a light frost can wipe out your 'bean patch' if you have not taken steps to protect them.

Beans need to be harvested frequently, as the individual pods mature. This will encourage the plants to produce more. Over-mature pods are woody, stringy and tough. Never cultivate, weed or harvest beans when the plants are wet; either from rain, watering, or morning dew. Doing so causes Bean Rust and Blight and can spread Mosaic.

Corn is another vegetable plant that is NOT frost hardy; even a light frost can kill your plants. Sweet corn seeds require warm soil (minimum of 15°C) to germinate properly. Plant your seeds about 1-1 ½ inches (2.5-4 cm) deep, about every 4-6 inches (10-15 cm) in rows at least 2 feet (60 cm) apart. To aid pollination, (corn is wind pollinated), plant your corn in a block formation as opposed to one or two long rows. This will also help prevent wind damage. Since the maturing cobs can make corn stalks 'top-heavy' ensure that the stalks have good strong root systems. Hilling the young corn plants when they are about 12 inches (30 cm) tall helps accomplish this. Side-dressing the young plants with a high nitrogen fertilizer is common practice as corn requires a lot of nitrogen to mature and produce properly.

Sweet corn ears are ready to harvest when the tip feels rounded (not pointy) and the silk has dried up. Try to avoid peeling back the husk to check on the maturity of the ear as much as possible. You may be inviting insect or bird damage if the ear is then left to continue maturing. For the sweetest corn, harvest the ears as close to time of consumption as possible. As soon as you pick an ear, the sugars in the kernels begin to convert to starch. This process slows in cooler temperatures, so refrigerate the ears if not preparing them immediately. Do not let your cobs get over-mature. The sugars in ears of sweet corn left on the stalk passed maturation begin to convert to starches.

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