

Growing Your Own

A beginner's guide to gardening

Green Beans

Green beans are easy to grow and quick to produce when picked while still green or immature. They are even more nutritious when allowed to slightly mature to produce “shelly” beans.

Varieties

Most beans will grow well in Kentucky's climate. Many common varieties of beans as well as heirloom, or vintage, varieties are popular in the state.

Pole beans. These beans require support, such as poles, or you can plant them along with sweet corn so they can grow up the cornstalk.

- Blue Lake S-7
- Kentucky Blue
- Kentucky Wonder
- King of the Garden
- White Kentucky Wonder 191



Kentucky Blue bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris*)
(Photo: All-American Selections)

Intermediate (half runner). These varieties do not need support, but are easier to pick when supported.

- White Half Runner
- State Half Runner

Bush beans. These are compact plants, so no support is necessary.

- Bush Snap Beans
- Provider
- Tendercrop
- Romano Bush
- Blue Lake
- Bush Yellow Beans
- Cherokee Wax
- Sure Crop Wax
- Kinghorn Wax
- Volunteer
- Lima
- Henderson Bush
- Dixie Butterpea White



Bush Fordhook 242 lima bean
(Photo: All-American Selections)

How much to plant

A 15-foot row of bush beans or a 5-foot row of pole beans should provide enough beans for fresh use for one person. Plant more if you wish to freeze or can beans for storage, or if you are providing for more than one person.

Don't use seed saved from last year because the seed won't grow well. Seed marked "treated" might help protect against disease.

How and when to plant

Beans are a warm-season crop. You should not plant until all danger of frost is past. In Kentucky, this is usually early to mid-May. For a continuous crop of beans all summer, plant seeds every two or three weeks until early August.

Bush beans: Plant seeds about 1 inch deep and about 3 to 4 inches apart in the row. The rows should be 2 or 3 feet apart.

Pole beans: With your rake, make several bean hills about 3 feet apart. Put a 6- to 8-foot stake in the center of each hill. Plant three or four seeds around the stake. Seeds should be about 1 inch deep in soil.

Plant beans in a different place in the garden each year to help prevent disease problems. If your garden is small, think about growing different crops each year.



Pole beans growing up and around a wooden stake. (Photo: Christy Martin, Russell County 4-H Youth Development Agent)



Pole beans with a wooden stake near each bean hill. (Photo: Christy Martin, Russell County 4-H Youth Development Agent)

Insects and pests

Holes in the leaves could mean your beans have Mexican bean beetle or bean leaf beetle. Ask your county extension agent for the latest information on controlling these and other pests. Some bean varieties also suffer from rust disease. Use varieties with resistance, and try to keep the bean leaves as dry as possible by aiming water at the roots, not the leaves. Also, plant them in an area that gets good morning sun in order to dry the morning dew.

Harvesting

Beans are ready to pick when they are the size of a small pencil. Pull them gently from the plant, leaving the tiny beans and flowers to develop later.

If you pick beans continuously as they are ready, the plants will keep growing for another two weeks or longer. If you planted beans every two weeks, the harvest should continue until frost.

In very hot weather, the flowers and small beans might fall off the plant. But when the weather cools, new blossoms will grow again and produce more beans.



(Photo: John C. French Sr., Retired, Universities: Auburn, GA, Clemson and U of MO, Bugwood.org)



An adult bean leaf beetle. (Photo: Kansas Department of Agriculture, Bugwood.org)



Seychelles pole bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris*)

Serving

Fresh green beans add color and variety to meals. They taste good if topped with green onions or herbs, as well as cooked with olive oil, butter, or meat drippings.

Green beans are a rich source of vitamins A, C, and K when cooked for a short time in a small amount of boiling water. Cook beans until they are just tender. Don't cook them so long that they are mushy. Beans are also good with a sweet-and-sour sauce or creole sauce.

You can freeze beans after blanching (heating for three minutes in boiling water), or you can use a pressure canner to can them. Ask your county extension agent for information on preserving green beans.

Storing

Store fresh beans in a crisper drawer, plastic bags, or other containers in the refrigerator. They'll keep for about a week.

For more information on managing pests and diseases, contact your county extension agent or consult the UK Cooperative Extension publication *Growing Vegetables at Home in Kentucky* (ID-128).

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