

Growing Your Own

A beginner's guide to gardening

Peas

Peas are a cool-season crop that are high in fiber and low in fat. Pea pods or shelled peas are a crispy, sweet snack and fun to pick and eat.

Varieties

There are several types of peas. Some grow on short, bushy vines. Others grow on long, climbing vines. All types will be easier to pick if trellised. Dwarf or bush varieties only grow two to three feet tall. Varieties commonly grown in Kentucky are listed in this publication with vine height noted after the variety name.

English, or shelling, peas are grown for the seeds (peas) inside the pod. Some recommended varieties that grow well in Kentucky are:

- Bolero (30 inches)
- Green Arrow (28 inches)
- Maestro (22 inches)
- Mr. Big (24 inches)
- Oregon Trail (24 inches)



Mr. Big
All-America Selections



Cascadia
Johnny's Selected Seeds



Sugar Ann
Johnny's Selected Seeds



Super Sugar Snap
Johnny's Selected Seeds



Sugar Snap
Johnny's Selected Seeds

Snow peas are also grown for their flat, tender pods. Some recommended varieties are:

- Oregon Giant (30 inches)
- Oregon Sugar Pod II (38 inches)

Southern peas are a summer crop and are grown differently. They will not be covered in this publication.

How much to plant

You can harvest about two pounds of peas for every 10 feet of row planted. Plant 10 to 15 feet for a single person, or 30 to 40 feet for a family of four.

How and when to plant

Plant peas in spring as soon as the ground is workable. Early planting often gives a bigger harvest. Peas can survive some cooler temperatures and frost. Plant more seeds every week or two to have a longer harvest.

Plant seeds directly in the garden about one inch deep. Space them one to two inches apart in the row.

You should grow peas along a trellis net or strings stretched between stakes. You can plant a double row with a line of seeds on either side of the trellis. If you plant a single row, leave two to four feet between rows. Peas can also be planted around a teepee trellis made of sticks or bamboo.



Oregon Giant
Johnny's Selected Seeds



Oregon Sugar Pod II
Johnny's Selected Seeds



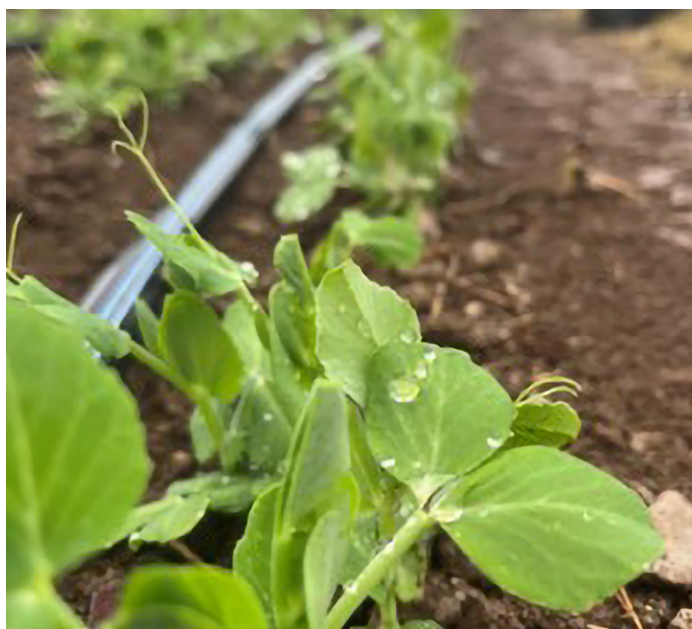
Pea seeds ready to be planted
University of Kentucky CSA

Pea Planting

Rows 2–4 feet apart
Seed Spacing 1–2 inches apart
Seed Depth 1 inch

Safe Planting Dates

Eastern Kentucky March 15 – April 7
Central Kentucky March 1 – March 21
Western Kentucky February 20 – March 14



Peas starting to grow in rows
University of Kentucky CSA



Pea vines growing up a bamboo pole teepee
Erika Olsen, University of Kentucky



Double row of peas growing on trellis netting
University of Kentucky CSA

Pests and diseases

Peas don't have a lot of pest problems, but gardeners should look out for a few possible concerns:

- Aphids can attack peas in warmer weather. Knock off aphids with a hard spray of water or squish them by hand.
- Sowbugs and cutworms can also be an issue.
- Powdery mildew may affect the plant late in the growing season or in the fall.
- Please see the UK Cooperative Extension publication *Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky* (ID-128) at <https://publications.ca.uky.edu/id-128>, or contact your Extension agent for information on dealing with pests.



Aphids on a leaf

Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org, CC BY 3.0



Powdery mildew on pea vines

Thirunarayanan Perumal, Banaras Hindu University, Bugwood.org, CC BY-NC 3.0

Harvesting

Most peas need around 60 days to grow before you can begin harvesting. Plants will flower and then pods will form. Dwarf peas have a shorter season and will produce pods over a week or two. Tall, vining peas produce over several weeks. Pea plants will often stop flowering and making pods when the temperature is above 85 degrees F.

Pick shelling peas when pods have filled completely. Harvest snap peas when the pods look almost full. Pick snow peas when the pods are still flat, before the peas start to grow. If snap or snow pea pods get tough, you can shell them and eat them like regular peas.

Harvest every two to three days. Gently pull the pod off the vine. Hold the vine if needed to keep the plant from breaking. Cool and refrigerate peas as soon as possible after you pick them.

Serving

You can eat fresh peas raw or cooked. Rinse pods before cooking or eating and remove any tough ends. Some varieties have a string you should remove. Leave shelling peas in the pod until you are ready to cook them, so they stay fresh. You can use raw peas in salads, with dips, or plain as a snack. To cook whole or cut peas, you can steam, boil, microwave, or roast them. Try adding them to stir-fries, soups, stews, and casseroles.

Storing

Store unwashed peas in a loose plastic bag in the refrigerator. The sooner you eat them, the sweeter they will be. They will keep for up to a week. You can also freeze peas for longer storage.

Clean up

Pull out the vines from your garden once they stop producing and start to brown. Compost healthy plant material. Throw away any diseased plants.



Pea pods ready for harvest
University of Kentucky CSA



Freshly harvested pea pods
University of Kentucky CSA

Summary

Varieties

The three types of peas commonly grown in Kentucky are English or shelling, sugar snap, and snow peas. Some recommended pea varieties are Bolero, Mr. Big, Cascadia, Sugar Snap, and Oregon Giant.

How much to plant

Plant 10 to 15 feet for a single person, or 30 to 40 feet for a family of four.

How and when to plant

Peas are a cool-weather crop that can survive some frost. Plant as soon as soil is workable in February or March. Plant seeds directly in the garden about one inch deep.

Pests and diseases

Peas don't have many problems. Watch out for aphids, sowbugs, and cutworms.

Harvesting

Pull pods off vines. Harvest shelling peas when pods have filled. Pick sugar snap and snow peas before the pods fill out.

Serving

Eat peas raw or cooked. Leave shelling peas in the pod until you are ready to cook them.

Storing

Store in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. They will keep for up to a week but are sweetest when first picked. You can also freeze peas.

Clean up

Remove vines once they stop flowering and begin to brown.

Authors

Erika Olsen, Extension Associate
Rick Durham, Extension Consumer Horticulture Specialist
Rachel Rudolph, Extension Vegetable Specialist

Contributors

Jann Knappage, Food System Specialist
Bethany Pratt, Food System Specialist
Rita May, Senior Extension Associate

Cooperative Extension Service

Agriculture and Natural Resources
Family and Consumer Sciences
4-H Youth Development
Community and Economic Development

MARTIN-GATTON COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, physical or mental disability or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. Reasonable accommodation of disability may be available with prior notice. Program information may be made available in languages other than English. University of Kentucky, Kentucky State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Kentucky Counties, Cooperating.

Lexington, KY 40506 Issued 08-2025



Disabilities
accommodated
with prior notification.