

## Garden Peas

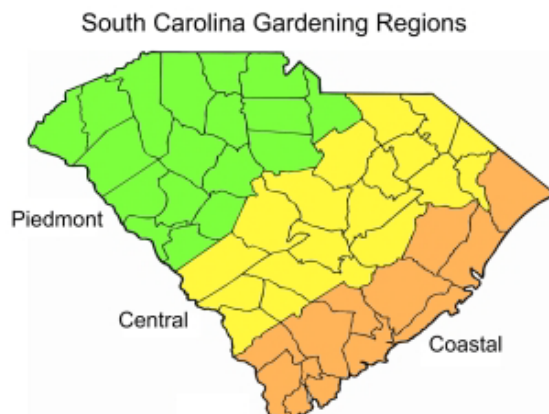
Garden peas (*Pisum sativum* L.) are cool-season crops that include the common green English pea and the edible-podded pea. English peas are shelled and only the seed eaten, whereas edible-podded peas are eaten whole. Edible-podded peas take two forms, the full-podded snap pea with large seeds and the flat-podded snow or sugar pea with undeveloped seeds. Wrinkled-seeded varieties of peas generally are sweeter than smooth-seeded varieties and are preferred for home use.

### Planting

Garden peas are cool-weather plants that can withstand frosts and light freezes, although the blossoms cannot. The plants suffer in the heat and humidity of summer, so plant pea seeds as early in spring as the ground can be worked. Fall plantings are not recommended. Early and mid-season varieties are recommended for South Carolina. Plant in full sun to ensure maximum flavor and sugar content.

### Planting Dates

Region	Date
Piedmont	February 1-15
Central	January 20 - 30
Coastal	January 10 - 20



Sow pea seeds 1 to 1½ inches deep and 1 to 2 inches apart in single, double, or wide rows. A single row consists of seeds sown in a straight line, whereas a double row consists of a set of 2 single rows spaced 2 to 4 inches apart. A wide row ranges between 6 and 18 inches in width, with the seeds broadcast in the row rather than sown in straight lines. The width of a hoe blade makes a convenient row width for garden peas. Regardless of row type planted, space rows 2 feet apart.

Peas are legumes and use *Rhizobium* bacteria that live in nodules along the root system to take up nitrogen from the air and convert it to a useable form. To increase the numbers of these helpful bacteria, especially in newly planted ground, pea seeds can be treated with *Rhizobium leguminosarum* biovar *viceae*. The bacteria can be purchased as a wettable powder that is applied to the moistened seed before planting, or in a granular form that is applied over the seeds in the row.



Pea trellis  
 Cory Tanner, @2010 Clemson Extension

Pea plants, even dwarf varieties, benefit from some type of support, so provide netting, trellis, wires, or pea brush for the tendrils to cling to. Pea brush

consists of branched shrub prunings inserted into the row for support of the climbing pea plants. Erect the support system before or immediately after planting seeds to avoid disturbing the roots of germinating and established plants.

### Recommended Cultivars

- English peas – Alaska, Mr. Big, Maestro, Wando (heat tolerant), Lincoln (heat tolerant)
- Edible-podded peas, snap - Super Sugar Snap, Sugar Sprint, Early Snap
- Snow or sugar peas - Snowbird, Oregon Sugar Pod II, Dwarf Gray Sugar

### Fertilizing

A soil test is always the best method of determining the fertilization needs of the crop. Information on soil testing is available in the fact sheet [HGIC 1652, Soil Testing](#). Follow the results of a soil test to maintain a soil pH between 6.0 and 6.5 and optimal fertility levels. If a soil test has not been taken, make a preplanting application of 5-10-10 fertilizer at 3 pounds per 100 square feet. Do not over-fertilize with nitrogen as it will reduce pea pod production.

### Watering

In the absence of adequate rainfall, water the garden to provide an even supply of moisture to the pea crop. Peas should be watered in the early morning so that the foliage will be dry before dark. Always water plants sufficiently to moisten the soil to a depth of 6 inches, as light sprinklings will encourage shallow rooting of the plants. The critical period for moisture is during pod set and development.

### Cultural Practices

Organic matter added to the soil during garden preparation will help loosen clay soils and help retain moisture in sandy soils.

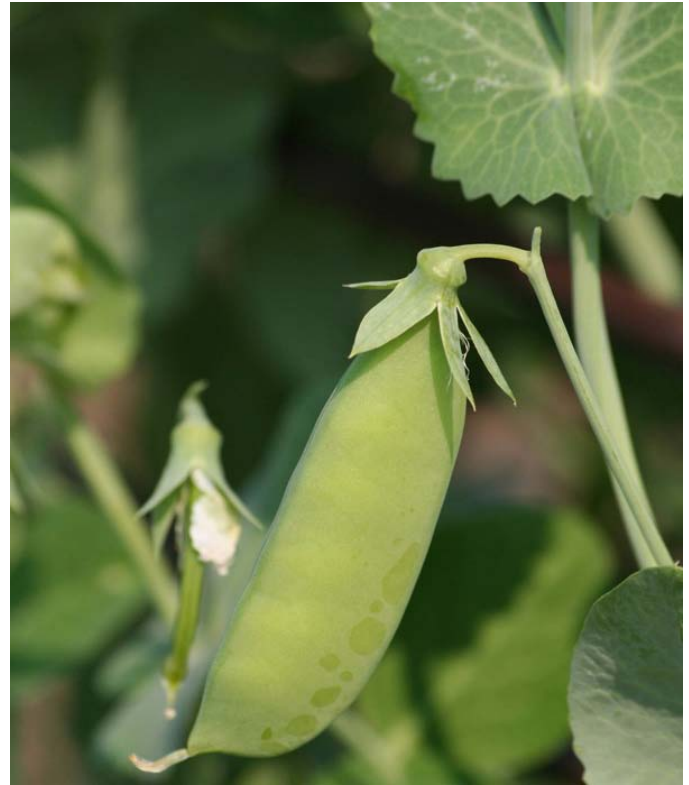
Planting in wide rows allows the pea plants to cling together and support each other. It also helps shade the plants' roots and keep them cool.

Mulch plants with 2 to 3 inches of organic material, such as shredded leaves or pine straw. This will help keep pea plant roots cool, prevent moisture loss and suppress weeds.

Raised beds can be prepared for clay soils, but are not recommended for sandy soils. See fact sheet [HGIC 1257, Raised Beds](#) for more information.

### Harvesting & Storage

Early varieties are ready to harvest in 55 to 64 days, mid-season varieties in 65 to 70 days. Pods on the lower portion of the plant mature first. Harvest pods every 1 to 3 days for peak quality.



Snap pea pod  
Flickr: cdw9, Creative Commons license 2.0

English peas and snap peas are ready to harvest when the pods become plump, but before each seed is individually visible in the pod and before the pod appears yellow or fibrous. For edible-podded types, harvest when pods are fully developed (about 3 inches), but before seeds are more than 50% of their full size. Wash and cool immediately. Pick snow peas while the pods are quite flat, and the seeds are tiny. This is usually within 7 days from flowering. Overripe snap peas and snow peas can be shelled and used like English peas. Alternatively, overly matured pods of garden peas can be dried and shelled with the dried peas used in soups.

To help prevent spread of disease, pick pods when the plants are dry. When harvesting, do not jerk pods from the vines as rough handling can cause plants to stop producing and even pull plants out of

the ground. Use two hands, one to support the plant and the other to detach the pod.

The sugar in peas quickly converts to starch, so eat, freeze or can as soon as possible after harvest to ensure maximum flavor. Fresh peas can be stored unwashed for 2 to 3 days in the refrigerator.

## **Problems**

Common diseases and insect pests include powdery mildew, Fusarium wilt, aphids and viruses spread by aphids. The Recommended Cultivars listed above are generally disease resistant.

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