



# Seed Savers EXCHANGE

## **How to Grow Peas (*Pisum sativum*)**

*It is easy to see why this early-season crop is a popular garden plant. Peas require little care beyond a trellis and pest protection, yet they produce prolific amounts of snappy pods throughout the spring and summer.*

**Time of Planting:** Sow peas outdoors as soon as the soil can be worked, but do not sow outdoors when soil temperatures are below 50 degrees F as germination is erratic and poor in cold soil.

**Spacing Requirements:** Seeds should be planted at a depth of ½–1 inch and between 2–3 inches apart. Space rows of peas at least 18 inches apart.

**Time to Germination:** Typically germination occurs between 7 and 14 days.

**Special Considerations:** Pea plants require a trellis to support their climbing habit. Panels of thick wire, such as cattle panels, work well for this purpose. Alternatively, you can set up bamboo trellises or build a system of chicken wire or twine for peas to climb. Peas do not tolerate drought, excessive temperatures, or waterlogged soil. Peas should be grown in an open, sheltered position on moisture-retentive, deep, free-draining soil.

**Common Pests and Diseases (and how to manage):** Pests common to pea plants include pea moths, pea thrips, and mice. Crop covers can help protect the plants from moths at the flower-bud stage.

**Harvest (when and how):** Peas can be harvested in the snap/green stage, the shelling stage, or the dry stage. Snap peas are ready for harvest when the pods are still tender, before the seeds start to swell. Shelling peas are ready when the pods are tender and the seeds are round and plump. Dry peas are ready for harvest when the pods are dry and brittle and the seeds inside are hard.

**Eating:** Early peas are make great fresh eating while later peas can be shelled and enjoyed in salads, soups, and stir fries. Snap peas and snow peas are often eaten whole. Dried peas can be cooked like beans and used in soups, stews, and dips. Pea shoots also make a tasty snack.

**Storing:** Blanch and freeze peas if you would like to save your spring flavors for another day; use within a year. Peas can also be left on the vine to dry. Dry peas will store for several years in a cool, dry place.

## **How to Save Pea Seeds**

*This crop is a great way to make your first foray into seed saving as peas produce seed the same season as they are planted and are mostly self-pollinating, minimizing the need to be mindful of preventing cross-pollination.*

**Life Cycle:** The pea is an annual crop. It will complete its full life cycle—including germination, reproduction, and death—in one growing season.

**Recommended Isolation Distance:** When saving seeds from peas, separate varieties by 10-20 feet.

**Recommended Population Sizes:** A single pea plant can produce viable seed. However, to maintain a variety's diversity over time, save seeds from 5-10 plants.

**Assessing Seed Maturity:** Pea seeds are ready for harvest when they are hard and their pods dry out and start to turn brown on the vine and shrink against the seeds. This is about four weeks after the eating stage.

**Harvesting:** If pea pods are not completely dry before the first frost, pull the plants up, root first, and hang them in a cool, dry location until the pods are brown and dry. When the pea pods are completely dry, break them open to release the seeds.

**Cleaning and Processing:** Pick the brown pods from the vines and remove the seeds. Separate seeds from the chaff. Seeds will require about six weeks of air-drying.

**Storage and Viability:** Store peas in cool, dark, and dry places and always keep them in an airtight container to keep out moisture and humidity. Under these conditions, pea seeds will live 3-4 years.

**For more seed saving and gardening tips, visit:  
[seedsavers.org/learn](https://seedsavers.org/learn)**