

How to grow peas

Marrowfat or mangetout, petit pois or sugarsnap, the variety and versatility of peas makes them a must for the veg patch.

Varieties we love

Before you start, you'll need to decide which peas to grow. Here's our guide to the different types of pea available.

First earlies

They're the first peas ready for harvest, in May and June.

Feltham First

A hardy, dwarf variety that doesn't grow too tall.

Kelvedon Wonder

A delicious, reliable and heavy cropping.

Second earlies

Harvested in June and July.

Waverex

A popular, sweet-tasting petit pois that can be harvested throughout the summer.

Hurst Green Shaft

An easy to grow and sweet-tasting with long pods.

Main crop

Harvested from July to October.

Dorian

A small plant with long, straight pods that are easy to pick early in the main crop.

Balmoral

A dark-foliaged variety that produces peas until October.

Mangetout

Flat-podded peas, eaten whole, pods and all, when the peas are just starting to develop. Harvest from June to August.

Oregon Sugar Pod

A popular, hardy variety with a deliciously sweet flavour.

Sugarsnap

Eaten whole, like mangetout, but their pods are rounded rather than flat. Harvest from June to August.

Sugar Ann

A pale, sweet-tasting and heavy cropping.

Prepare and propagate

For the perfect pea, choose an open, sunny bed with rich, free-draining soil. Don't forget, your peas will get quite tall so make sure they won't overshadow any other plants.

If they're going into an existing vegetable plot, peas love soil that potatoes have previously lived in. The earth will be nicely broken up and full of nutrients, and rotating your crops will help avoid pests and diseases building up in the soil.

Short of space? Go for a dwarf variety like Feltham First, which will grow happily in a pot or growbag.

About a month before you sow your seeds, dig plenty of compost or well-rotted manure into the soil to improve its structure and drainage.

For an extra boost, add some general purpose fertiliser two weeks before you sow.

Peas don't like being planted in cold, wet soil, so a few weeks before you start sowing or planting out, cover the ground with a cloche or some fleece to bring the soil temperature up to around 10°C.

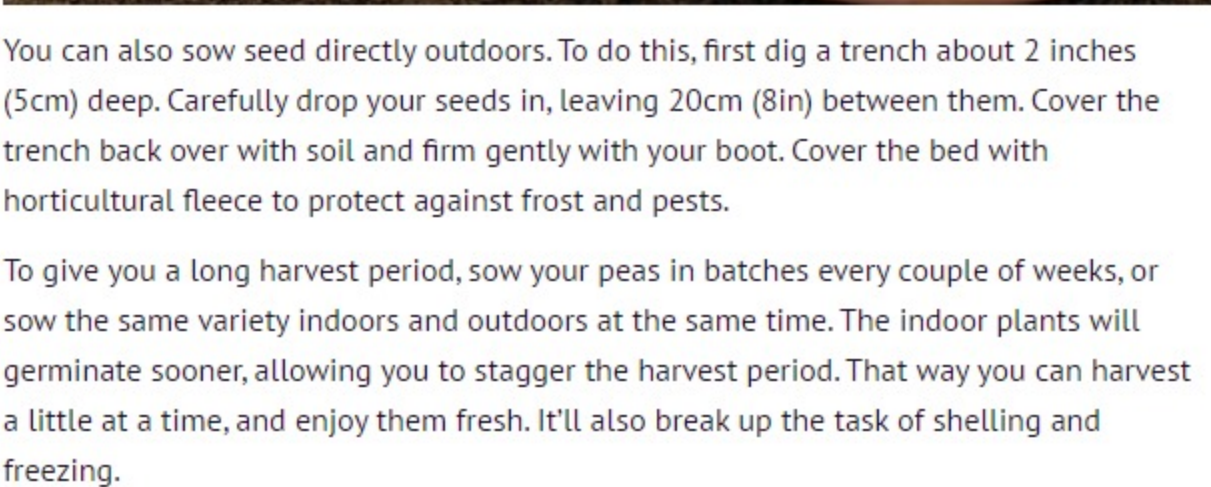
Unless you're planting dwarf varieties, your peas will need supports to climb up, and it's easier to put these in before you plant. If you have twiggy branches to spare as a result of pruning, these can be pushed into the ground for young seedlings to wind around. As they get bigger, some tall varieties might need a trellis or bamboo supports to anchor onto with their tendrils. A bit of garden twine will help keep wayward shoots in place.

Sowing times vary depending on when your peas are to be harvested. Here's a handy guide:

- ➔ First early peas: Sow in February and March.
- ➔ Second early peas: Sow in March and April.
- ➔ Main crop peas: Sow in April and May.
- ➔ Mangetout and Sugarsnap peas: Sow between March and June.

Sowing indoors gives your seedlings protection against pests such as [slugs](#), mice and birds while they are starting out.

Sow your seeds in root trainers (these are specially designed modules with space for seedlings to develop long roots), or use the inner cardboard tubes from toilet rolls. Fill the modules or tubes with seed compost, water lightly, then make a 2-3cm (1in) deep hole in the compost with your finger or a dibber and drop a seed in. Cover over with compost and leave on a sunny windowsill to germinate.



You can also sow seed directly outdoors. To do this, first dig a trench about 2 inches (5cm) deep. Carefully drop your seeds in, leaving 20cm (8in) between them. Cover the trench back over with soil and firm gently with your boot. Cover the bed with horticultural fleece to protect against frost and pests.

To give you a long harvest period, sow your peas in batches every couple of weeks, or sow the same variety indoors and outdoors at the same time. The indoor plants will germinate sooner, allowing you to stagger the harvest period. That way you can harvest a little at a time, and enjoy them fresh. It'll also break up the task of shelling and freezing.

Plant

Once your seedlings are around 10-15cm (4-6in) tall, and the roots are just beginning to poke out of the bottom of the root trainers, they are ready to be planted out. Pick a warm, dry day for your planting.

Root trainer modules are designed so that you can open them out, making it easy to take out the seedlings without damaging them. If you're using cardboard toilet roll tubes, it's even easier; just plant the seedlings tube and all, and let the cardboard break down in the soil.

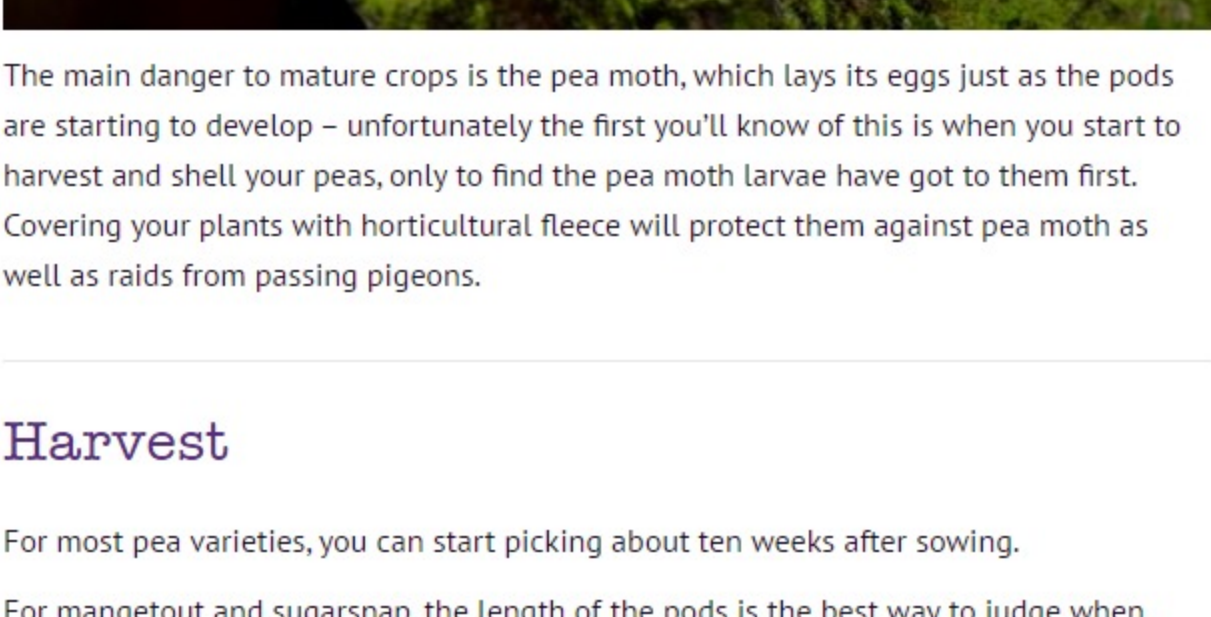
Space the seedlings around 20cm (8in) apart. If you're planting more than one row, leave a space between rows equal to the expected height of your plants (check the seed packets for details).

Finally, cover the plants with cloches or horticultural fleece to keep your crop safe from frost as well as birds, mice and [slugs](#).

Care

Water regularly during dry spells, especially during flowering and when pods are starting to develop. As the plants grow, check that they are well supported - they will do most of the work themselves by wrapping their tendrils around whatever support system you've provided.

Pests and diseases



The main danger to mature crops is the pea moth, which lays its eggs just as the pods are starting to develop - unfortunately the first you'll know of this is when you start to harvest and shell your peas, only to find the pea moth larvae have got to them first. Covering your plants with horticultural fleece will protect them against pea moth as well as raids from passing pigeons.

Harvest

For most pea varieties, you can start picking about ten weeks after sowing.

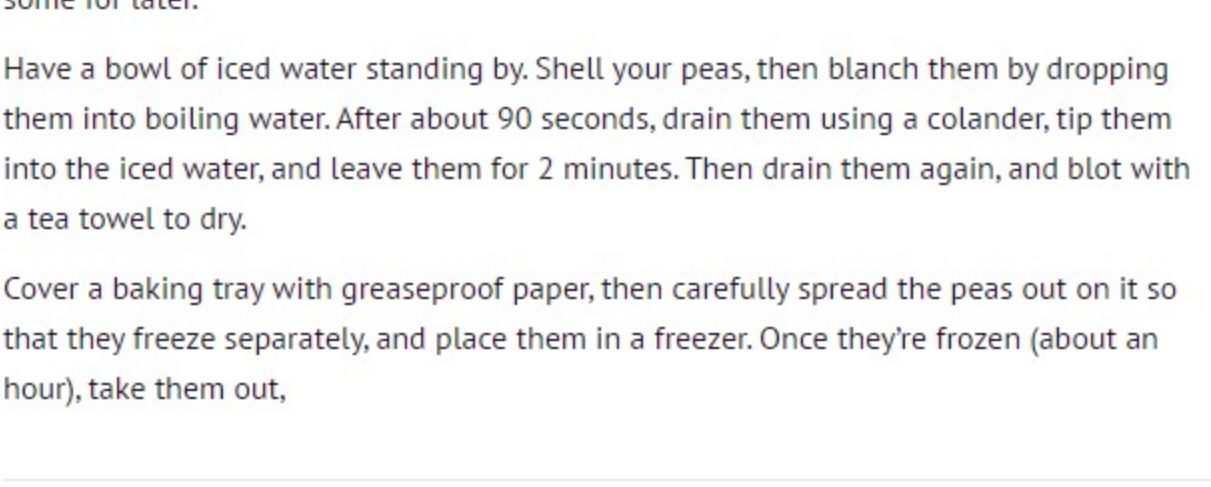
For mangetout and sugarsnap, the length of the pods is the best way to judge when they're perfectly ripe. Check your seed packets to find out what you're looking for.

Once they're ready, pick them quick or they'll start to lose their sweetness. The good news is, the more you pick, the more you'll get as new pods are encouraged to develop after each harvest.

To help keep them fresh, make sure you keep the calyx (the star-shaped cluster of leaves at the top of each pod) attached.

For a change, try adding pea leaves and shoots to salads and sandwiches instead. [Pinch shoots off](#) just above the second leaf down and you'll also help new branches form.

Once all the peas are picked and the crop's come to an end, grab the secateurs and get composting. Peas (as with all legumes) are a wonderful source of nitrogen for the rest of the garden, so cut the stems right down to the ground, then dig the roots into the soil. The stems and leaves can go on the compost heap to be used next year.



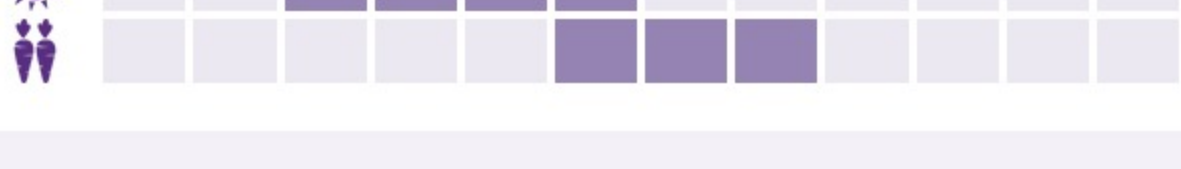
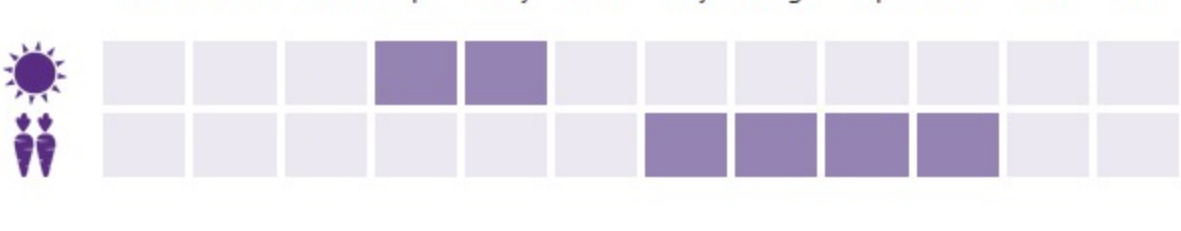
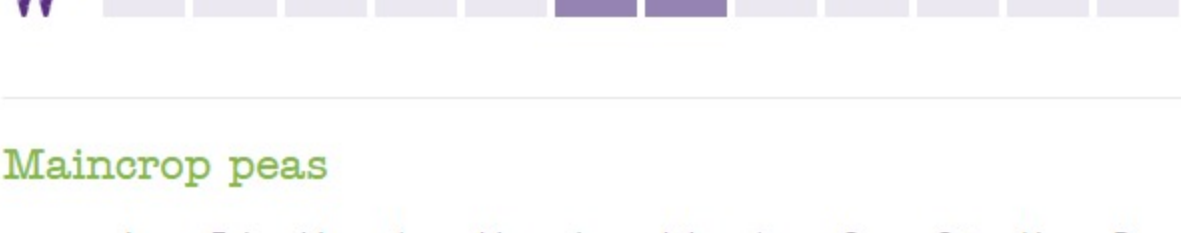
Store

Peas are best eaten fresh, but if you've got a bumper harvest, you can always freeze some for later.

Have a bowl of iced water standing by. Shell your peas, then blanch them by dropping them into boiling water. After about 90 seconds, drain them using a colander, tip them into the iced water, and leave them for 2 minutes. Then drain them again, and blot with a tea towel to dry.

Cover a baking tray with greaseproof paper, then carefully spread the peas out on it so that they freeze separately, and place them in a freezer. Once they're frozen (about an hour), take them out,

Growing calendar



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