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Horticulture News

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Not only are peas one of the tastiest vegetables in the garden they are one of the most cold tolerant plants grown in Kansas gardens. They can be planted about as early as soil can be prepared in the spring. Most varieties produce pods and the seeds need to be shelled. Several newer varieties produce thick, fleshy pods, and the pods as well as seeds can be eaten. In addition, some thin-podded oriental types produce tender pods with only the pods used. Southern peas or cowpeas are an entirely different crop and are grown in much the same way as beans.

Varieties. Standard varieties include Little Marvel, Green Arrow, Maestro, Knight, Sparkle, and Burpeeana. Edible-podded types include Sugar Ann, Sugar Bon, and Sugar Snap. Oriental thin-podded types, often called snow peas, include Dwarf Grey Sugar and Mammoth Sugar.

When to plant. Plant seed in early to mid-March when soil is dry enough to work. Peas will germinate when soil conditions are favorable. Peas are not well adapted for fall gardens because seed usually fails to germinate well in warm soil.

Spacing. Plant seed 2–4 inches apart with rows 12 inches apart. Peas usually do best where 2–3 rows can be planted 4–6 inches apart to allow the weak, spindly vines to support each other.

Care. Peas prefer cool soil and need water during stress periods. They grow best in moderate- to well-fertilized soil. A trellis may be needed to support the flimsy vines; short wire mesh or string trellis works well.

Harvesting. When the pods are swollen so that seeds within are full sized but tender, pick and shell the peas from the pods. Edible-podded types should be picked and used immediately after harvest as they tend to dry out readily. Harvest oriental types when the pods are crisp and tender but before the seeds begin to enlarge significantly. Store peas in a refrigerator in a plastic bag for up to a week. Peas are easily frozen for later use.