

GROWING PEAS

The flavour of freshly picked garden peas is much finer than that of either fresh or frozen field grown peas - one of the great treats of the vegetable growers year.

In a small kitchen garden it is generally best to grow only one or two rows of early peas to be harvested with the first carrots, French beans and turnips. As soon as the peas are finished, the ground can be used for growing leeks or cabbages.

On a larger plot, peas can be grown in succession for picking from May to October if the right varieties are sown at the right time.

There are two main types of peas:

1. Hardy, round seeded peas are sown in late autumn and early spring for picking in late May and June.

2. The wrinkly type, which has a sweeter flavour, can be sown only from March to July for harvesting from June onwards.

In addition, there are sugar peas - also known as mangetout - which are grown in the same way as garden peas but are picked when the seeds have only just begun to develop. They are cooked and eaten whole.

PLANNING THE CROP

Peas grow best on rich, well-drained soil. Good drainage is particularly important for early varieties, as the seeds will rot in cold, wet soil.

Dig the plot at least 3 or 4 weeks before sowing, working in a bucket of compost or well rotted manure to the square yard. A week before sowing, rake in a top dressing of general fertilizers such as Fish, Blood and Bone at 2-3 oz per square yard (60-90 g per square metre).

Some good recommended varieties:

EARLY ONWARD FIRST EARLY

Dark green, well-filled blunt nosed pods. A heavy cropper producing peas of a delicious flavour 8-10 days earlier than Onward and it is also a wrinkled type seed. Has a height of about 2 feet. Suitable for freezing. Can be sown from March to June.

ONWARD SECOND EARLY

Very widely grown in all areas. Heavy crop of blunt ended pods in pairs containing plump peas. Excellent for table and freezing and outstanding for exhibition. It has a height of about 2 feet and can be sown from March to June. It is a wrinkled type seed.

KELVEDON WONDER FIRST EARLY

Thin shelled, pointed narrow pods in pairs. Heavy yielding and of fine flavour. It is also resistant to mildew and is suitable for a June/July sowing reaching a height of about 18 inches. It is a good freezer as well.