

Plant Peas Soon

Peas are a popular spring crop and like potatoes are one of the earliest crops planted in the garden. Peas are a short-season crop that mature in late May and June. They are a natural match with new potatoes and pearl onions and can offer additional cash flow as early crops at local farmer's markets.

Optimal temperatures for pea germination and growth are between 55 and 64 degrees. Growth ceases when temperatures reach 84 degrees. Peas grow best in well-drained, sandy loam soils. Heavier soils reduce root growth and increase susceptibility to root rot. Peas are sensitive to water-logged soil.

Peas harvested by hand should be planted in double rows on a 30-inch bed. Peas are very susceptible to a poorly prepared seedbed, resulting in uneven germination, stands and maturity. Seeds should be planted about 1.5 to 2 inches deep and spaced 1 to 2 inches apart in the row. Short or determinate cultivars need not be trellised. However, trellising makes harvest easier and more efficient and reduces losses to pod rot. Trellis may also be used for a sequential fall crop of cucumbers after the peas are finished in late June or early July. Tomatoes, cabbage, squash or a final planting of sweet corn also can be planted into the same area after pea harvest.

Peas are very responsive to temperature and develop rapidly, especially in warm weather. Peas are ready to harvest about seven days after flowering. Optimum quality only is maintained for a day or two. Varieties that performed well in Nebraska include Top Pod, Oregon Trail, Early Frosty, Lincoln, Knight and Little Marvel.

Peas should be chilled as quickly as possible after harvest. This slows the rate of sugar converting to starch and reduces pod dehydration. If the pods need to be washed, use cold water to help chill them. Good quality pods are bright green and velvety, have a fresh appearance and are well-filled.

Pea's typical shelf life is seven to 10 days. Peas are sensitive to ethylene and should not be stored near cut flowers, tomatoes, muskmelon, or apples once harvested. Peas are best if kept in the pods and refrigerated until just before cooking as the post-harvest shelf life of shelled peas is greatly reduced.

SOURCE: Laurie Hodges, UNL Vegetable Specialist.