



## Planning & Planting: Ordering Seeds

The weather outside is frightful, and it's hard to believe that the growing season is just a couple of months away! This is a great time to plan your garden beds, hole up with some seed catalogs, and place some orders. But ordering seeds can be more difficult than it seems.

Choosing varieties can take some time and effort, and once you've gotten that part figured out, how do you determine the number of seeds you need? Once you know what varieties you want, here's how to estimate the number of seeds.

1. Look in the seed catalog to see what spacing is recommended for the seeds. You should find two numbers: one for spacing between the seeds and one for spacing between the rows. **Example: Peas should be spaced 1in apart in rows 2ft apart.**
2. Think about how much space in your garden you will devote to this particular crop. It's helpful to think about how long and how wide the space is and how many rows you can fit within that space. It can be helpful to draw your garden to scale on graph paper. **Example: I have a 5ft x 5ft space. I can fit 3, 5ft rows (with 2ft between them and .5ft buffer on the outside of the outer rows) within this space.**
3. Add up the linear feet you have available for the crop. **Example: 3 x 5ft rows = 15ft total bed length for peas.**
4. At this point is usually easiest to convert the number of feet to inches, since most seeds are spaced in inches. **Example: 15ft x 12in/ft = 180in.**
5. Divide the number of inches you have available for the crop by the spacing of the crop. **Example: 180in total/1in per pea seed = 180 pea seeds.**

Now that we know how many seeds we need, we just need to research how many seeds (on average) there are in the weight units the seed companies are using. Seed companies generally list this information in their catalogs and online.



Seeds vary in their sizes, shapes, and weights. To determine how many seeds of a particular crop are in a measurement of weight (like oz., g., or lbs.), look in a seed catalog.

**Example:** The seed catalog estimates there are 2000 pea seeds per pound. So, we can use the equation,  $180 \text{ pea seeds} / 2000 \text{ pea seeds per pound} = .09 \text{ lb}$ . We need about 1/10 of a pound of seeds for our 3, 5ft rows.

Our seed catalog lists peas by the pound and in a packet size. The packet holds 250 seeds. So we would probably purchase the packet, unless we knew that we wanted to continue planting that variety in future years. If we knew we liked the variety and had a good place to store the seeds, we would purchase the next larger increment, which is 1/2 lb. Purchasing a larger amount usually decreases the cost of the seed per unit.

Because most seeds store well in cool, dry conditions, it often makes sense to purchase more than enough seeds for one year. We recommend storing seeds in an airtight plastic bag in the refrigerator or freezer. [Here is a chart](#) that lists the number of years you can expect seeds to last and remain viable.

It seems somewhat complicated to do so much math to determine the amount of one crop to buy! And if you've got a very small garden space, you may want to forgo the math and just buy a packet of seeds of each crop. But for those of us with medium to large gardens, doing the math and buying an appropriate amount of seeds reduces waste and saves money. Happy calculating!