

## Garden Tips & Techniques: Planting Peas

Peas are one of the first crops you can plant in the spring. Traditionally in this area, they are planted on St. Patrick's Day: March 17. They are cold-hardy, so putting the seeds in the ground early works just fine, as long as the weather doesn't stay very cold and very wet for an extended period of time. Since peas produce well in the cool weather of spring, so you'll have a longer harvest if you get them in the ground with plenty of time before the summer heat.

There are several types of peas, all of which can be found on short or tall plants, depending on the variety.

- Shell peas have inedible pods. They take some time to shell, and don't produce much for the amount of space they take up in the garden. However, they taste amazing! It's worth growing a few at some point. We recommend Green Arrow (a short variety).



- Snow peas have flat, edible pods with tiny peas inside. They are ripe when the pods reach the intended size for the variety. We recommend Mammoth Melting (a tall variety).



- Snap peas have large peas inside an edible shell. Crunchy and addictive, these are favorites on our Grow Pittsburgh sites. We recommend the tried and true Sugar Snap (a tall variety).



Short varieties of peas don't need to be trellised, but it definitely makes harvesting easier if you provide some support for tall varieties. [Here is more information about pea trellises.](#)

Peas are one of many legume crops that benefit from inoculation. A pea inoculant is a type of rhizobial bacteria that helps the peas form rhizomes – or nodules – on their roots. These rhizomes enable the plant to absorb Nitrogen from the air and convert it into a usable form in the soil. (Nitrogen is an essential plant nutrient.) Healthy soils have some of this type of bacteria but not enough to maximize pea production. With the addition of inoculant, peas grow more vigorously, resist disease better, and produce more.

You can purchase inoculant from reputable seed companies. Be sure to order inoculant that is specifically for peas. Inoculant comes in the form of a powder. Dampen your pea seeds and sprinkle them with the powder immediately before planting. Or, sprinkle the inoculant in the trench after you've planted your seeds. You'll want to use up all of the inoculant, as it won't last until next season.



These peas have germinated and begun growing. They are mulched with straw to keep back weeds and maintain soil moisture.

#### Here are the steps for planting your peas in a raised bed or in the ground:

1. Make sure the soil is ready for planting. It should be somewhat crumbly – not frozen or water-soaked. A fistful of the garden soil should fall apart slightly if you open your hand.
2. Add any soil amendments that your garden needs, based on a soil test. If you don't know what your beds need, compost is usually a good general-purpose addition for good fertility and soil structure.
3. Create a trench where the peas will be planted. You can use a hoe, trowel, or your hand. The trench should be about 1" deep, and about 1" across. Alternatively, you can make a wider, 3" trench, and place more pea seeds in the row. We recommend using the wider trench method if your space is limited. If you are planting more than one row of peas, leave about 12-18" between each row. *Remember that you will need to get to the pea rows to harvest them, so leave enough space for comfortable access.*
4. Place pea seeds in the 1" wide trench, about 1" apart from each other. If you created a wider, 3" trench, spread the seeds out across the trench, keeping them 1" apart.
5. Carefully push soil over the seeds in the trench and tamp it down, lightly. You want soil to touch the seeds on all sides.
6. Gently and thoroughly water the bed. Depending on the weather, the seeds will germinate in about a week or two. Cool soil makes the seeds germinate slower. Peas' optimal germination happens at a soil temperature of around 80 degrees, but they can germinate at soil temperatures as low as 45 degrees.

**For planting in a container, inoculate your peas and follow these steps:**

1. Select a large container with good drainage. Peas need at least 8-10" of depth in the container.
2. Pick a good quality potting mix (a mix specifically for containers is best) and add some compost or other slow-release fertilizer.
3. Place newspaper in the bottom of the container to keep potting mix from falling through the holes. Fill the container with the potting mix/compost mixture, up to 3" below the container's rim. Pat the potting mix down lightly and add more if necessary.
4. Place your inoculated pea seeds on the potting mix surface, with 1" spacing around each pea. The pea seeds do not need to be in rows – they can cover the surface of the potting mix.
5. Cover the pea seeds with 1" of potting mix and tamp it down lightly. The potting mix should cover the peas completely and make contact with all sides of the seeds.
6. Gently water the pot until water drains from the bottom.

If you are planting in a container, short varieties are a good choice. They will be healthier and won't tip the container over. If you are using a very large, stable, deep container, tall varieties can work, with a trellis that is stabilized outside of the container.