

Easy Gardening

SUGAR SNAP PEAS • SUGAR SNAP PEAS • SUGAR SN

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The sugar snap pea (*Pisum sativum* var. *macrocarpon*) is a member of the bean family. Sugar snap peas are like snow peas in that we eat the entire pod. A difference is that the pods of snow peas are flat and those of sugar snap peas are round.

Unlike beans, peas do not open when they are ripe or have a membrane in the pod. Most cultivars are climbing vines and need a trellis for support (Fig. 1). In seed catalogs, they are described as tall climbers.

Varieties

These varieties are best for Texas:

- Cascadia (60 days from planting to maturity)
- Premium (51 days)
- Sugar Ann (60 days)
- Sugar Bob (55 days)



Figure 1. Most cultivars are climbing vines and need a trellis for support.

- Super Sugar Snap (65 days)

An heirloom variety, Amish Snap, requires 60 days from planting to maturity.

Soil preparation

Before planting the peas, remove all weeds and trash from the planting area. Then till the soil 8 to 10 inches deep and rake it several times to break up the large dirt clods. Work the garden soil only when it is dry enough to not stick to garden tools.

Planting

In the spring, plant sugar snap peas as soon as you can prepare the soil. Sugar snap peas are a cool-season vegetable and can tolerate light frosts even when the plants are small.

In the fall, plant sugar snap peas in the last 8 to 10 weeks before the first expected frost to guarantee a plentiful harvest.

Plant the seeds 1 to 1½ inches deep and 1 inch apart in single or double rows (Fig. 2). Allow 18 to 24 inches between single or pairs of rows. Allow 8 to 10 inches between double rows in pairs.

Once the seeds have germinated, cover the seedlings if a light frost is expected. This protection will help the plants continue to grow and to produce earlier.

Fertilizing

Sugar snap peas are nitrogen-fixing plants: They take nitrogen from the air and change it into a form that they can use for food. To increase the crop, add a nitrogen-fixing inoculant, which contains the bacteria that inoculates the plant roots and helps it convert nitrogen into plant food.

An inoculant is usually a powdery material that you moisten with water and coat the seeds with before planting.

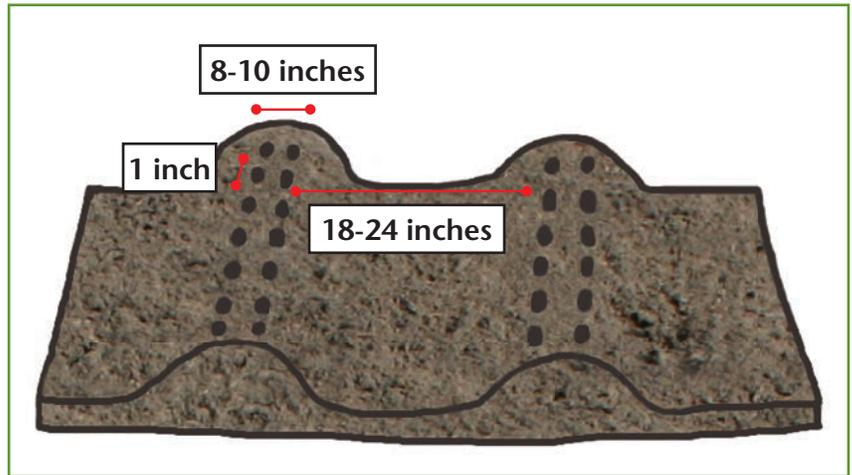


Figure 2. The beds for sugar snap peas should be 8 inches high and 18 to 24 inches apart.

Inoculants are sold in small packets at garden stores and via the Internet. They are especially useful in an area that is being planted for the first time.

Watering

Do not let the soil dry out but do not overwater. You may need to irrigate once a week if no rain has fallen.

Diseases

Fusarium wilt is the most common disease of sugar snap peas. Infected plants have yellow, wilting leaves, particularly the lower leaves.

Because peas are planted early in the season when the soil is still cold and moist, Fusarium wilt is likely to occur, especially if the soil does not drain well. To reduce the chances of Fusarium infection, incorporate abundant organic matter to the bed and improve soil aeration and drainage by preparing the soil well.

Harvesting

Harvest when the individual peas have grown to the size of BBs, or when the pods

have reached their full length. This stage is usually reached 5 to 7 days after flowering.

Pick the peas at least every other day to ensure that the pods are sweet and free of fibers. As soon as you discover an overgrown pod that you missed earlier, remove

it to keep the plant blooming and producing longer.

The pods can be stored in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks. Unlike fresh green peas, these pods deteriorate only slightly in quality when stored.

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