

Peas for Exhibition

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Scottish Branch**



Pea History, Culture and Epicural Delight

Origins; **Pisum Sativum**, an annual plant with a life cycle of one year. Although used mainly as a vegetable, peas are botanically fruit.

The earliest history of the wild pea is restricted to the Mediterranean basin and near East with archaeological finds from the late Neolithic era of current Greece, Syria, Turkey and Jordan.

Interestingly, dried peas were the basis of Pease porridge and pea soup, staples of Medieval Cuisine in Europe. The consumption of fresh immature peas, became an innovation of early modern cuisine.

Whilst starchy, peas have a good nutritional value and are high in fibre, protein and vitamins.

Culture – Making a Start

If possible, preparation should be carried out in the autumn, because peas are deep rooting subjects. Double digging the bed is advised, incorporating a plentiful supply of well-rotted humus or farmyard manure to both spits, followed by a dusting of lime to sweeten the soil, after which we can safely rely on the Winter frosts to breakdown the rough surface.

The following spring, a dressing of 1½oz of Superphosphate of Lime and 1oz of Sulphate of Potash is applied per square yard.

Since peas, in common with many legumes, contain symbiotic bacteria which have the ability of fixing nitrogen from the atmosphere, the addition of Nitrogen is unnecessary.

Which Strain

There are many excellent varieties of peas available to grow, however one particularly favoured for exhibition purposes is **Show Perfection**, a cross between **Achievement** and **Evergreen**, giving rise to a long elegant pod with good colour.



For particularly good results, peas should be grown on a cordon system using 8ft long bamboo canes at each station. Stabilise the canes by running a string or wire along each row and fasten to posts at each end.

I allow 1 ft between each cane and if space allows, 5ft between rows.



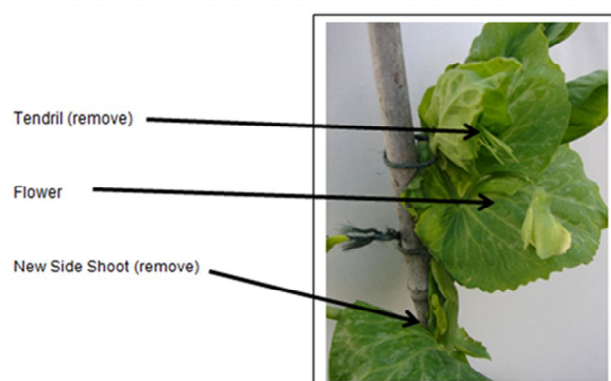
Sowing Dates

This can be difficult as there are so many considerations to factor in. For example; the date of an important show or the climate in your particular geographical area etc. Suffice to say, chat with most gardeners and exhibitors and they will acquaint you with their particular environment and sowing dates according to past experience. In my own case, this is 17 weeks prior to my target show, growing outside (or 15 weeks if growing under cover). This date will seem a trifle early for Northern gardeners and positively obscure for growers in the South, however it's right in my particular location as I experience, nine months of Winter and three months of Artic !

Sow seeds about 2" deep and if desired, further sowings can be made at ten day intervals. If the soil is dry, water in and leave. Being deep rooted subjects, this will encourage the pea to develop a vigorous rooting system. Once established, water as necessary particularly during prolonged dry spells, or if growing under cover.

Growing On

Retain only the strongest shoot for the leader and secure as growth develops. Side shoots should be removed as they manifest themselves. The removal of tendrils is optimal.



As pods start to develop after flowering you may wish to remove any pods which are mis-shapen or have gaps.

Other options include removing lower pods if these are deemed to be too advanced for a particular show.

Some exhibitors restrict the number of pods to six or eight per plant in an effort to obtain a more substantial pod. Incidentally, in my own area, the average time from flowering to full pod development is about 30 days (dependant on the vagaries of weather of course).



Assuming the growers earlier efforts concerning bed preparation have been thorough, further feeding should be unnecessary. However, if a supplementary feed regime is considered beneficial, apply a weak solution.

Pests, Diseases and General Growing Conditions

There are many causes of general disorders in peas. Notable amongst these include;

Mice and Rats

At the time of sowing, don't leave excess peas lying about the bed, since this will initially draw their attention, and if desired, traps can also be set.

Viruses

Often spread by aphids and water droplets when raining. Remove affected plants immediately and avoid composting.

Pea Moth

Curiously, I have not been troubled for a few years with this pest but if experienced in your area, spray at the flowering stage with a suitable insecticide.

Overwintering in a cocoon in the soil, this 6mm long, brown moth emerges in May/June and lays its eggs on and around the pea flowers from (mid) June to July. The black-headed caterpillars move into and live in the developing pod, eating their way through the peas to greet you at about 8-10mm long when you open the pod. If not picked, they will eat their way out of the pod, fall to the soil and prepare their cocoon for winter.

Symptoms

- The pinhead-sized, flat eggs are difficult to spot
- First sign of infection is usually when the pod is opened.

A damaged pea or two, a caterpillar or two and caterpillar poo (frass) are a sure sign of pea moth.



Birds

Sparrows, pigeons and finches can be a severe nuisance with pecking and damaging pods. Consequently it may be necessary to net off affected areas.

Powdery Mildew

The bane of all pea growers, normally manifesting itself later in the season.

Initially appearing lower in the vines and easily overlooked, but becoming very vigorous and will establish itself throughout the plant.

At the earliest sign, spray with a general Fungicide adding some baking powder to the mix, then dust with Flowers of Sulphur.



Great care must be taken when chemical sprays are used to ensure that pods are not tainted in any way. The following two photos show peas grown in the same garden with and without the use of Fungicide



General Growing Conditions

Outdoors versus undercover?

I have had the privilege to win at the highest level in growing in both of these environments, however after having the peas completely ruined on two separate occasions by hailstone damage, it seemed sensible to try and avoid this predicament by growing in a Polytunnel.

If asked to compare both methods, I would say you can expect to produce a more robust and vigorous vine in the open, and providing you do not experience too much wind turbulence thereby potentially bruising the pods, there is absolutely no reason a first class exhibit cannot be achieved.

Conversely, whilst the pods may be slightly smaller , when grown under cover, you can always expect to produce quality pods.

I would add that since peas are classed as “Cool Season” plants, it is important to provide adequate ventilation, and for this reason, growers in the south may consider the practice of growing under cover as undesirable whereas Runner Beans or French Beans may be perfectly suited to this environment.

Peas for Stock

When it comes to saving pea seed, I leave the pods on the vine at least until the wrinkly stage. Try to select long, broad and straight pods to ensure you have a vigorous strain for future sowings. Do not concern yourself with gaps/misses in the pod since this relates to pollination problems and is not a genetic fault. Lay the pods out on seed trays and allow to dry out turning occasionally during the process. After the pods become papery, I remove and store in paper bags. Peas harvested this way will remain viable for a few years.

Gathering and Staging

Always leave picking pods as late as possible prior to a show.

Layer seed trays with kitchen roll and cut pods using scissors by holding the stem only. Avoid any contact with the pods to keep the bloom of the pea intact. Select those that have a fullness of pod.



flat

full ✓

"gone over"

When selecting pea pods, hold the pods up to a light source and check for gaps and small not fully formed peas. (discard these). Try, where possible to select pea pods with the highest number of fully formed peas in each pods. 11 peas per pod is a good quantity to aim for, but anything from 9 and upwards is quite acceptable. Quality of pod comes first, but if you have a choice of two pods , equal in size and condition, then go for the one with most fully formed peas (as the judge opens one pod at random and a high quantity of fully formed peas may make a difference in points).

In 2006, I was lucky to have won at the National Championships, and upon opening the pea pods after the show, I was able to photograph one pod containing 14 peas. This doesn't happen very often, but shows the merits of seed re-selection through the years.



After harvesting, arrange the peas on a work surface, longest at one end and tapering down accordingly, also taking cognisance of shape and form.

In this way, a nice uniform set can be achieved. Always add a full extra pod as insurance for your final selection, after which, cover with kitchen roll and place your selected pods in a cool environment.

Take time and care when staging at the show to ensure that the pods are spaced and displayed tidily and make sure you have exhibited the correct number !

Then it's all down to the Judges.

Closing Words

Without wishing to sound patronising, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the proficiency and competence of many of my fellow exhibitors in this field, and hopefully they will consider some suggestions in this article to enhance their already well tried and successful methods. Conversely, others who may be finding their way in the subject will benefit with some helpful information which will allow them to progress accordingly.



National Winners 2015 @ Dundee



If you are interested in growing vegetables for exhibition or the kitchen
why not join us. Please visit www.nvsuk.org.uk

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