

Sugar Snap Pea

Grow

Known as a legume and vegetable

Peas are a legume that have been around for thousands of years. Legumes are plants that bear fruit in the form of pods enclosing fleshy seeds. There are two main kinds of peas based on their pods. Green or garden peas have sweet, full-sized seeds and inedible pods. Edible pea pods yield seeds or peas that are encased in pods that do not need to be shelled. The seeds are not fully developed so the entire pea pod can be eaten. The two main types of edible pea pods are sugar snap peas and snow peas.¹⁻²

Pea plants can grow as a bush or climbing vine. Plant the pea seeds 1 inch deep and about 2 inches apart. Plant rows of bush pea plants 12-18 inches apart. Plant rows of vine pea plants 18-24 inches apart. Sugar snap peas are a cool-season crop that must mature before the weather gets warm. The ideal growing temperature for sugar snap peas is 55-70 degrees F. Sow sugar snap peas in the garden 6 weeks before the average last frost date in spring or as soon as the soil can be worked. Sugar snap peas will be ready for harvest 55-80 days from sowing.³

Fun Fact: Sugar snap peas were developed in 1979 to meet demand for edible pod peas that are sweeter and larger than snow peas. The fibers in sugar snap pea pods grow in one direction making them easier to chew.¹⁻³

Choose

Only 5% of the peas grown are sold fresh. The rest are either frozen or canned. Choosing frozen over canned is more ideal, as they tend to better retain their texture, color, and flavor. When choosing frozen or canned peas, select low or no salt added products. For fresh sugar snap peas, choose pods that are firm, velvety and smooth with a lively medium green color. Pea pods with a green color especially light or dark or those that are yellow, whitish or are speckled with gray should be avoided. Additionally, do not choose pods that are puffy, are water soaked, or have a mildew residue.^{1,3-5}



Store

Sugar snap peas are generally available from late spring through early summer. If the peas are not going to be used fresh on the day of purchase, which is the best way to enjoy them, refrigerate them as quickly as possible in order to preserve their sugar content. This prevents it from turning into starch. Unwashed, unshelled peas stored in the refrigerator in a bag or unsealed container will keep for several days. Fresh peas can also be blanched for 2-3 minutes and then frozen.^{1,3-5}

Fun Fact: Peas have been found in 10,000 year old historic sites.¹⁻²

Use

Often served fresh in salads or eaten whole, sugar snap peas may also be sautéed or steamed. The cooking process will cause snap peas to become sweeter. In addition to eating fresh, sautéing is a good way to have a tasty side dish while preserving nutrients. Before eating, mature snap pea pods may need to be "stringed," which means the membranous string running along the top of the pod from base to tip is removed. Over-cooking the pods will make them come apart. Wash under running water before eating or cooking.^{1,3}

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Teach

Sugar snap peas are a popular legume worldwide

Peas are thought to have originated from Thailand and Burma, the Middle East, or Ethiopia. While growing about 3 million tons of peas per year, Canada is currently the largest world producer and exporter of peas. France, China, Russia, and India are also large-scale producers of this legume. Despite being a large-scale producer of peas, India is also the world's largest importer of this food due to its great popularity in that country.¹⁻²

Fun Fact: Sugar snaps peas are a cross between green peas and snow peas.^{1,3}

Sugar snap peas are ideal for children to grow as they are easy to plant and tend. They also sprout and grow relatively quickly compared to other plants.

Class Activity - Sprouting Sugar Snap Peas

Materials Needed:

- A paper towel
- Resealable plastic bag
- Ruler, marker and stapler
- 2-3 Sugar snap pea seeds
- ½ cup water
- Tape

Steps: *Use food safety steps. Wash hands and produce.

1. Fold a paper towel so it just fits inside the plastic bag.
2. Put the folded paper towel into the plastic bag.
3. Take your ruler and measure 3 inches from the top of the bag, and staple the bag from left to right multiple times. Now, you have a mini-pocket, 3 inches deep, with paper sticking out. This is where your seeds are going to sit.
4. Pour the ½ cup of water into the bag. Then, add the seeds to the mini-pocket.
5. Seal the plastic bag so no air can escape or get into it. Tape the plastic bag to a window. Watch your seeds sprout. When you can see the roots and stems, your seeds have germinated. Plant them in a pot or in the ground, and watch them grow!³

Eat

One cup of fresh sugar snap peas has about 40 calories and is cholesterol free and low in fat and sodium. They are an excellent source of vitamin C and a good source of iron. They also contain dietary fiber.⁶

Fun Fact: Edible-pea pods are referred to as *mange tout*, a French term meaning “eat all”. They are also called *snapping peas* for how they can be snapped and eaten like green beans.

Vitamin C helps our body absorb iron and folate from plants, protects us from infections and bruising, aids in healing, keeps our gums healthy, helps form collagen to hold muscles, bones and tissues together, and acts as an antioxidant to prevent cell damage. Iron serves as an essential part of hemoglobin, which carries oxygen to all body cells. Iron aids in brain development, supports a healthy immune response, converts beta-carotene to vitamin A and is used to make collagen, connective tissue, body proteins, some hormones and myoglobin, a protein that provides oxygen to muscles. Soluble fiber helps lower blood cholesterol. Insoluble fiber aids in digestion.⁷

Fun Fact: Pea plants were originally all vines or climbers (indeterminate), but recent breeding has resulted in bush (determinate) plants. Determinate plants reach a certain height or size and stop growing. Indeterminate plants keep growing and producing all season.^{1,3}

Find

For more sugar snap pea info and resources, visit:

1. California Harvest of the Month, <https://harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov>
2. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, <https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/programs/fresh-fruit-vegetable>
3. North Carolina State Extension, www.ces.ncsu.edu
4. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, www.fns.usda.gov
5. Fruits & Veggies For Better Health, <https://fruitsandveggies.org/>
6. USDA FoodData Central, <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/index.html>
7. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, www.eatright.org