

Home Gardening Series

Southern Peas

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Vegetables

Environment

Light – sunny
Soil – well-drained loam
Fertility – medium to light
pH – 5.8 to 7.0
Temperature – warm season
Moisture – average to drought
resistant

Culture

Planting – seed 1 inch deep
Spacing – 2 x 24 inches
Hardiness – tender annual
Fertilizer – light

Southern Peas – *Vigna unguiculata*

The southern pea, also known as the cowpea, is thought to have originated in Africa, where it has been eaten for centuries. It traveled to Egypt as long as 3,000 years ago and was common to the European and Asian diets. Southern peas were probably brought to the West Indies in the 17th century. They later became a common food in the United States. One of the more popular ways of cooking black-eyed peas is a dish called “Hoppin’ John,” a traditional African-American dish served on New Year’s Day for good luck.

The southern pea (cowpea) is a very popular vegetable in Arkansas. While many different types are available (Blackeye, Pink Eye, Purple Hull, Cream and Crowder), they are all southern peas and the basic culture is the same for all types.



Cultural Practices

Soils

Southern peas adapt to many soil types; medium fertility with pH of 5.8 to 7.0 is desirable. High fertility produces excessive vine growth and poor yields. N-fixing bacteria inoculants may increase yield especially in soils where peas have not been grown.

Planting Time

Plant southern peas after the soil is thoroughly warm (62 degrees F or greater) in late spring or early summer. This vegetable is very tolerant to hot weather and can be planted throughout the summer with very good results. For fall planting, plant about 65 to 75 days prior to the average frost date to be sure of production.

Spacing and Depth of Planting

The space required will vary a bit from variety to variety. Generally, plant southern peas at a rate of five to seven seeds per foot and 1 inch deep.

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Cultivars

Variety	Days to Maturity	Seed/100 Ft of Row	Disease Resistance or Tolerance	Remarks
Elite _{ar}	70	4 oz		Resistant to fusarium wilt. Cream, erect plant type, good yield and quality.
Mississippi Silver	75	4 oz		Resistant to fusarium wilt and nematodes. Cream crowder, semi-bush type, good yield and quality.
Pink Eye Purple Hull BVR	75	4 oz	Bacteria Virus Resistant	Low, bushy, purple hull type.
California Black Eye #5	75			Resistant to fusarium wilt. Erect plant type, good yield.
Top Pick – Pink Eye, Cream or Brown Crowder	67	4 oz		These are selections from Arkansas releases. Erect plant type. Concentrated pod set. High yield.

ar = Arkansas release

Care

Normally, a light fertilizer application is applied at or prior to planting. Southern peas fix nitrogen from the air, thus excess nitrogen fertilizer may encourage vine growth at the expense of production. If prolonged periods of dry weather occur, irrigation during flowering and pod fill will be very beneficial for maximum production.

Harvesting

Southern peas are normally harvested at the mature green or roasting ear stage. This stage is characterized by fully grown seed that have not started to dry.

Common Problems

Southern peas are not troubled with diseases and insect problems to the extent that snap beans are. Fusarium wilt and nematodes, two of the more common problems, can be controlled by crop rotation, site selection and resistant varieties.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What causes my southern peas to grow extremely large vines but fail to set any pods?

A. Failure to set pods can be caused by a number of things; the most common problem is overfertilization. Southern peas, if overfertilized, grow large

plants but fail to set many pods. Thrips, an extremely small insect which attacks the blooms of southern peas, can also cause poor pod set.

Q. Can I save seed from this year's black-eyed pea crop for next year's garden?

A. Yes, but this is not recommended. Peas are self-pollinated, and seed may be saved for planting in next year's garden. However, several types of seedborne diseases may show up if seeds are saved for later plantings.

Q. Why are my pea plants always yellow when they first come up then turn green after plants get larger?

A. Yellow plants early in the season are usually caused by cool or wet soils. As the temperature warms and the soil dries, the plants will usually turn green.

Q. My southern peas come up every year looking damaged. The leaves are curled and snarled. What is wrong?

A. The apexes or shoots of the leaves were damaged when they were very small by a tiny insect called a thrip. The thrip rasps the tissue of the leaf's growing point causing it to bleed or secrete plant juices. The thrip then feeds on these juices. Most plants recover from this damage. Thrips can be controlled with diazinon or malathion applied at seven- to ten-day intervals. Spraying should begin when plants have just emerged since most damage occurs then.

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