

TOM'S GARDEN

BLOG MARCH 2022

Planting peas is one of the first things we do each spring in the vegetable garden, (or should be.) The taste of fresh peas from the garden is incomparable. Sometimes the peas are gobbled up right there in the pea patch before reaching the house. Peas are easy to grow and very productive. They will give you a harvest about 8 weeks from sowing.

Some folklore says to plant peas on St Patrick's Day. My advice is to plant as soon as the soil is workable and when soil temperature is 45 to 50 degrees. If the soil is wet, the seeds may rot before planting. Some years I have had three inches of snow on the ground on St Patrick's Day. You can warm the soil early by placing black landscape fabric on the bed for a week or two. This method also works for starting sweet corn early.

Like most vegetables, peas grow best in full sun and fertile, well-draining soil. Work in some compost, manure or slow-release organic fertilizer. Sow seeds one inch deep and 2 to 3 inches apart.

Pea plants like to climb using tendrils to grip. Even shorter bush pea varieties like to be staked off the ground. This also makes harvesting easier. Don't wait until the plants are growing to install trellising, do it when planting the seeds.

There are basically three types of peas.

*Shell peas: harvest when the pods are plump and before they become starchy.



Shell pea

*Snap pea: pick snap peas when 2 to 3 inches long and are plump. The pod is edible and tender.



Snap pea

* Snow pea: pick these while still flat with small pea bumps.



Snow pea

Be sure to keep peas picked. If overmature pods are left on the vine, the plants shut down new growth.

Succulents

Generally, succulents need plenty of sunlight or bright light, rapid drainage and deep but infrequent water.

Some things to keep in mind:

(1) Pick the right variety for your location.

Certain plants don't like direct sun, but indirect light. It's a good idea to Google the name of your plant to find the best growing conditions. If you only know the common name and not the scientific name, that will usually work. Plants in the same species will usually have similar growing conditions.

(2) Keep them on the sunny side, but.... some succulents and even cacti need protection from hot afternoon sun outdoors in summer. You can tell if they become sun-scorched and unhappy.

(3) Keep them dry. Use a well-draining succulent soil for the planting medium and be sure the container has a drain hole. Clay or terra cotta pots are best. You can leave plants out in the rain in summer providing you use the correct soil.

What to look for in a succulent soil mix

Organic and inorganic matter

DIY soil is cheaper, easier and more adaptable to each plant.

Basic recipe:

One part organic matter, such as potting soil for every two parts of inorganic matter which could include:

Pearlite, coarse sand, gravel (1/8 inch), pumice, granite or chick grit and horticultural lava rock, which makes a colorful top dressing.

If you are growing cactus, use extra grit.

Avoid peat moss or vermiculite which stores water.

Another thing I like to use is one part Bagged succulent soil mix with one part "Bonsai Jack" gritty mix. You can find that online.

Whenever you get a new plant, it's important to repot it in fresh medium. Remember succulents need light, airflow and some water. Keep them on the dry side.

Protecting your plants from wildlife

Your gardens, young trees, shrubs and

emerging plants and bulbs are especially appealing to wildlife in the spring. The fresh, new, tender plants can be irresistible, especially after a winter with lots of snow cover. Hungry animals will go after your prized ornamentals.

The top offenders will be deer, rabbits, racoon and rodents.

Deer can cause serious damage any time of year, but especially in spring. A family of deer can ruin immature shrubs and trees in no time. The plants we love are their favorite plants to munch on. Alas, if we could only get them to dine on weeds and invasive plants!

Deer really like azaleas, hostas, tulips, cherry trees, small maples and just about any flowering young plant. You can camouflage these plants by using other plants that deer don't like. Delphiniums, impatiens, daffodils, irises, yarrow and zinnias top that list. Anything with a strong scent like rosemary, thyme and any of the mints will deter deer. These plants can also add color and texture to the garden.

Putting up a fence or barrier is another option and is more foolproof but can be unsightly. Some of the newer black fencing can barely be noticed especially from a distance and the mesh keeps deer away. Once the deer become accustomed to your plants, it's hard to break that habit. Some people have luck with spray deterrents, but they wash off in a rain and have to be reapplied.

Rabbits will eat your spring planted lettuce patch. The best bet is to put a 24 inch fence around it, buried a few inches deep.

Groundhogs are another matter. I know of no fence that will keep them out. The best bet is to trap and release them somewhere else before they raise a family.

Top 5 Vegetable Seed Companies

- (1) Johnny's Selected Seeds (Winslow, Maine)
- (2) Seed Savers Exchange (Decorah, Iowa)
- (3) Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds (Mansfield, Mo)
- (4) Burpee Seeds and Plants (Warminster, PA)
- (5) Territorial Seed Company (Cottage Grove, Ore.

These ratings are based on the array of varieties with consistent high germination rates. These companies provide detailed growing information and detailed descriptions of each variety.

It is also a good idea to buy seed that will thrive in your area.

Ground Cherry (Physalis.)

Ground cherries have fruit loosely enclosed in papery husks. The tomatillo is a physalis. These plants originated in the Americas. All are started just like tomatoes and are very easy to grow, no staking required! Physalis varieties store extremely well when kept in their papery husks, lasting a long time under refrigeration. They can be used fresh or cooked and are very juicy and sweet. Try some this year for something different, you may get hooked as I have.