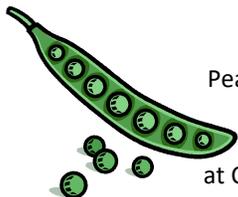




GROWING PEAS AS A THERAPEUTIC GARDENING ACTIVITY



Peas (*pisum sativum*) are one of the oldest cultivated vegetables and an easy and delicious spring crop for Therapeutic Gardening clients to raise. No commercially available pea tastes as good as the one you harvested five minutes ago! "Endeavor to have your peas in the ground by Valentine's Day," advises Wesley Greene, Historic Gardener at Colonial Williamsburg.

Although you will not have a large crop, peas can be successfully grown in containers. The containers have the added advantage of being portable and the soil in them can be worked earlier than water-logged soil in the ground. Position a trellis in the container before you plant and sow pre-soaked seeds directly in two rows with peas close together (about ½ inch apart). Peas don't like to be transplanted. Consider dusting seeds with an inoculant to the soil. This active rhizobia bacteria, available at nurseries in granule or powder form, improves plant growth by forming nitrogen-fixing nodules on the roots.



Peas restore and conserve the soil. Water as needed but use care. Peas don't like wet feet. Fertilize monthly. Weed as necessary and mulch lightly if weather turns warm. Peas are a cool season crop, being planted when the soil reaches 40 degrees; the plants will begin to decline as soon as the weather is consistently hot. (80 degrees and above.)

Little Marvel, a shelling pea, was grown in the Therapeutic Gardening program at New Zion Baptist church during spring 2014. The program began in mid-March and even with this 'late' start for pea-planting, the crop was harvested in early June! Snap peas (edible pea and crunchy pod) or snow peas would also be excellent varieties to try. Choose a pea with shorter vines if growing in a container. Harvesting requires that you predict what is inside the pod from what you see and feel outside. This may take a bit of practice. Growing a snow pea eliminates this guesswork! Harvesting is a two-handed operation – hold the vine with one hand and remove the pod with the other. Folk advice: pick 'em often, pick 'em all.



New Zion clients enjoyed watching the peas grow and could see real changes during each bi-weekly session. In June, they had a lesson about different kinds of peas (snap peas and snow peas) as well as a taste of their crop served with a veggie dip. The plants were left in their container because the pea vines had become a nesting place for Mrs. Wren and her brood; however by mid-June, the peas will have declined and the container can be used for another crop.

Helpful books include: *The Bountiful Container* by Rose Marie Nichols McGee & Maggie Stuckey, *Growing Vegetables the Big Yield Small Space Way* by Duane Newcomb, & *Incredible Vegetables from Self-Watering Containers* by Edward C. Smith.

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