



eats

Peas, Please

By Therese Gustin

Just last week I was perusing seed catalogues and picking out several of my favorite varieties of tomato and pepper seeds. I placed my order and started planning out my vegetable garden for this year. Last year was the first year a lot of my friends started a vegetable garden. For some, it was a little disappointing as their 'Heirloom' tomatoes never produced the abundant harvest they were promised. Only a few carrots emerged and their red peppers never quite changed color from solid green. I told them not to be discouraged and try again this year with their favorite veggies. I also suggested they try an easy veggie like peas.



I grow peas every year. Not only are they easy to grow, they are one of the earliest veggies to harvest. My favorite is snow peas. Their sweet taste and crispy texture are delicious in stir fry dishes or right off the vine. I like to cut them up and toss them into a green salad. New Dimension Seeds carries a variety called 'Jumbo Snow Pea'. Like its name suggests, it is larger than most varieties, reaching up to 6 inches long. 'Sugar Snap' peas are another favorite. They plump up a bit more than the flatter snow pea, but they are sweet and crunchy as well. 'Sugar Snap' peas have edible pods and are delicious sautéed with onions or garlic or eaten raw. If you let them mature, the peas fill the pods and can be shelled as well. The pod of shelling peas is bitter and not edible. Harvest these varieties when the pods are plumped up and you can see the shape of the peas inside, and before the pods turn yellow.

All peas need a type of trellis to grow on. It can be as simple as a tepee made of bamboo stakes, two stakes with netting in between, or my favorite...tomato cages. Peas are a cool season crop that can be planted as soon as you can work the soil in the spring. They take up very little space as they grow vertically. Since they are legumes, they need very little fertilizer as they make their own nitrogen. Pea seeds should be planted about an inch deep and 3 to 4 inches apart. I can grow quite a few pea plants around a square, collapsible tomato cage (and by the time I need the cages for my tomatoes, the peas are finished producing). You can also stagger your planting for a longer season or start another crop in late summer to produce a fall crop.





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Peas, Please...continued

Peas are especially fun to grow with children. The large size seed is easy for small fingers to plant and the relatively short growing period gives them something to look forward to without a long wait. When my kids were little, I rarely had enough peas to bring into the house and cook...they always seemed to pluck them off the vine before I could harvest them. I couldn't ask for a healthier snack!

If you are itching to get started on your garden, and want a sure success, plant a few packages of peas this year.

Veggie Stir-fry

(Serves 6)

You can use any combination of your favorite vegetables in this recipe.

Ingredients:

4 cups of sliced summer squash (yellow and/or zucchini)
 2/3 cups red bell pepper
 ½ cup diagonally sliced celery
 1 cup snow peas (whole or cut in half)
 ½ pound sliced mushrooms
 ½ cup sliced onions
 ½ cup of thinly sliced carrots
 2 tablespoons cornstarch
 1 ½ tablespoons brown sugar
 3 tablespoons reduced sodium soy sauce
 1 (10 1/2 oz.) can low-sodium chicken broth
 2 cloves minced garlic
 2-3 teaspoons grated fresh gingerroot (you can store unused gingerroot in the freezer)
 6 cups of hot cooked rice

Directions:

Coat a large nonstick skillet with cooking spray. Combine all veggies and stir-fry ½ at a time for 3 minutes over medium-high heat. Remove from skillet and set aside. Repeat with remaining vegetables; stir fry 3 minutes and set aside. Combine cornstarch, brown sugar, soy sauce and chicken broth; stir well. Add garlic and gingerroot to skillet; sauté 30 seconds. Add cornstarch mixture; bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Cook 1 minute or until thickened. Stir in vegetables; cook 1 minute. Serve over rice.