

Saving Bean and Pea Seed

The large Fabaceae family includes peas, lentils, and an impressive and colourful range of beans. Since a number of pea and bean species are self-pollinating and have small isolation distances, they are perfect for beginning seed savers, or those with small gardens.

| | Beans (bush & pole), Soy & Mung beans | Runner beans | Broad beans (fava) | Peas |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|------|
| Minimum plants for non-commercial seed saving | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Pollination | Self | Insect/Self | Insect | Self |
| Isolation Distance for non-commercial seed saving | 3m | 200m | 250m | 3m |

Beans don't cross with peas or other legumes, but different varieties of beans cross with each other, and different varieties of peas cross with each other. You can plant a row of beans next to a row of peas, but if you have two kinds of peas, separate them by the distance shown above.

GROWING

Make sure you are growing open pollinated, not hybrid, seed! Sow peas in early spring, since they prefer to grow in cool temperatures. Sow beans after danger of frost has passed. In many Canadian regions, beans may require the full season of growing to mature fully.

Isolate different varieties by planting them apart by the distances shown in the chart above. Some bush beans and early peas have a definite stage of flowering, after which all the flowers turn into pods, and no new flowers appear. If you get the timing right, it's possible to sow these varieties side-by-side so that only one variety is in flower at a time. Try sowing a row of early bush beans, followed by a different variety of bush beans right beside it three or four weeks later.

Prevent viral and bacterial diseases by digging out sick-looking plants and harvesting pods from healthy ones.

HARVESTING

All legumes hold their seeds in pods that split open from both sides. Leave the pods on the plant until they turn brown and dry. As long as the pods are green, they are still providing nourishment to the seeds, which have not reached their full maturity.

For beans, you can get excellent results by picking the dry, brown, fully mature pods by hand, but you may have to repeat the harvest several

times if the pods don't all ripen at once. If you have enough dry space, you can cut the plants at the base and dry them whole. Be sure to spread them out so they are well ventilated. The green pods will ripen to the mature dry, brown stage in about a week.

For peas, harvest the seed pods when they are brown and dry on the plants. Wait until the leaves have died back for the best seed maturity, but if you wait too long after this stage, the pods will split open and drop the seeds on the ground. It is easier to remove the seeds from the pods when they are completely dry.

If frost threatens to kill your plants, cut the plants whole, and allow them to dry in a non-freezing, ventilated space where the seeds can mature as best as possible. Your harvested pods will not dry if the air is humid. If necessary, use a fan to circulate the air.

THRESHING

To tell if the seeds are ready, bite one – if it feels hard like a pebble between your teeth, it's likely dry enough. If the seeds are soft, they need to dry more. The pods should also be completely dry and brittle.

If you are saving a small amount, crack the dry pods with your fingers and remove the seeds. If you are saving several pounds of seeds, you can save hours by threshing. One way to do this is to place the fully dried plants on a tarp or in a large bucket and crush them with a piece of wood, your feet, etc. If they are well-dried, the pods of most varieties shatter easily. Shake the tarp or bin to make the seeds sift to the bottom, and remove the crushed pods and stems from the top. Seeds can be further cleaned with screens or by pouring them back and forth between two buckets in the airstream of an electric fan. 🌱🌱🌱

The complete guide on *How to Save Your Own Seeds*

For step-by-step instructions on saving seed from beans, peas and other vegetables, check out our new handbook, *How to Save Your Own Seeds*. With clear illustrations, easy-to-read reference charts, separate instructions for beginners and experts, botany basics and pollinator profiles, this book has all you need to know about growing, harvesting, and storing seed from the vegetables and herbs in your garden. Find out more and order your copy at www.seeds.ca/saveyourseeds.

