

Post Rock Answers
By Cassie Homan March 11, 2021
Post Rock Extension District Horticulture Agent

Cure the Gardening Itch by Planting Peas

If you are tired of winter and hunger for spring, try planting peas as soon as the soil temperature reaches 40 degrees. Peas should be planted shallow, about one-half inch deep, to encourage rapid germination and emergence. Place each seed about two inches apart in the row. Many people often plant two rows 6 to 8 inches apart so the floppy plants can support one another. For some older varieties, this may not be enough. They may need trellising to support the growing vines. Rabbits love to eat peas so you might need to consider fencing around the garden.

There are several types of peas that can be plant in Kansas. Probably the most common is the shelling pea and the old standard in this group is Little Marvel. Though Little Marvel is still on our recommended list, we have a number of others that do well including Green Arrow, Knight, Maestro, Burpeeana and Mr. Big. All of these are early maturing types that allow us to harvest a crop before the hot weather arrives and stops production.

Snow peas are those commonly used in stir-fry that have a crisp edible pod. Recommended varieties include Dwarf Grey Sugar and Mammoth Melting Sugar. Sugar snap peas resemble shelling peas but have a thick, fleshy pod and can be eaten fresh, steamed or cooked. Like snow peas, they are not shelled but eaten pod and all. We recommend Sugar Bon, Sugar Ann, Super Sugar Snap and Sugar Sprint.

Measuring the soil temperature is a great indicator of when to start crops. To take the temperature of the soil use a metal soil thermometer, which is sold in many garden, auto parts and hardware stores. Take the temperature 2.5 inches deep at about 10 to 11 a.m. Temperature variations throughout the day and night affect soil temperature, with lowest readings after dawn and warmest around mid-afternoon. The late-morning reading gives a good average temperature. If taking the soil temperature at this time is not practical, take a reading before you leave for work and a second when you return home and use the average. Also, be sure to get a consistent reading for four to five days in a row before planting, and make sure a cold snap is not predicted.

You can also use the KSU Mesonet Website to find local soil temperatures, and historical weather.

If you want to get a head start on your garden, a number of vegetables can germinate and grow at cool temperatures. Lettuce, parsnips, and spinach can sprout at a soil temperature of 35 F, though they prefer at least 45 F for best germination and growth. Radishes also do well at a soil temperature of 45 F. If you have any questions on planting peas, or other vegetables this spring, contact your local Post Rock District Extension Office.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Cassie may be contacted at choman@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit (738-3597).