

GROWING GUIDE FOR BEANS

Binomial Names:	Cicer arietinum, Phaseolus lunatus, Phaseolus vulgaris, Vigna unguiculata, Vicia faba
Varieties:	Witkiem, Blauhilde, Cape Sugar, Tongues of Fire, Rotsamige, Purple TeePee, Karmesin, Black Hopi, Dolichos, Prize Winner, Black Soya, Angel Bean, Yellow Wax, Provider, Transkei Mix, Royalty Purple Pod, Golden Wax, Old Homestead/Kentucky Wonder, Roma II, Blue Lake.
Start:	Seeds
Germination:	8 to 15 days, 20°C to 30°C
Seed Life (viability):	4-5 years
Soil:	Well drained, slightly acidic
Sunlight:	Full sun
Sow Seeds:	2.5 to 5 cm apart
Thin to:	7.5 to 10 cm apart
Ave. Days to Harvest:	60 to 100
Good Companions:	Beetroot (not for runner beans though), Cabbages, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celery, Eggplant, Lettuce, Peas, Potatoes, Pumpkins, Rosemary, Sage, Savory, Spinach, Sweetcorn, Yarrow.
Bad Companions:	Basil, Chives, Garlic, Fennel, Leeks, Onions.

Sowing & Planting:

Beans generally do not respond well to transplanting, and are usually direct sown around or just after the last spring frost. The most important point about growing beans is not to plant them too early. They will rot in cool, damp soil. Even so, many beans require a long growing season of 80 days or more. To get an earlier start, you can put down black plastic, to warm the soil.

Most beans should be sown with the eye of the bean facing downward. The ideal site will be sunny, well-drained, moderately fertile, and slightly acidic (pH 6.0-7.0). Additionally, bean plants should be well-ventilated to promote proper development and deter mildew or mould that can trouble the plants. Beans should not be grown in the same spot more than once every three years, and can be mutually beneficial with corn, strawberries and cucumber.

Tip: Avoid planting beans near onion or fennel.

Plant bush beans in either rows or blocks, with 10-15cm between each seed and 60cm or more between rows. Plant the seeds 2 1/2 - 5cm deep and be sure to water the soil immediately after sowing and then regularly until it the seeds sprout.

Growing:

Pole (climbing or vine) beans will need some type of support to grow on. Be sure the trellis, teepee, fence or whatever is in place before you sow your seed. If using a teepee type trellis then plant the seeds at a rate of about 3-6 seeds per teepee or every 15cm apart.

When watering, try to avoid getting the leaves wet as this can promote fungus or other damaging conditions that beans can be susceptible to. Most types of beans are somewhat drought resistant, but check the surface of the soil frequently and water when the top layer has become dried out.

Once established, beans generally will not require fertilizing and will generate their own nitrogen. However, if the leaves of young plants are pale this is an indication of nitrogen deficiency and starts can be fertilized with fish emulsion or other natural nitrogen rich fertilizer.

Bush beans begin producing before pole beans and often come in all at once. Staggered planting, every 2 weeks, will keep your bush beans going longer. Pole beans need time to grow their vines, before they start setting beans. The pole bean crop will continue to produce for most of the season.

Pole beans may need some initial help in climbing. Keep the bean plants well watered. Mulch helps keep their shallow roots moist. Long producing pole beans will benefit from a feeding or a side dressing of compost or manure about half way through their growing season.

Harvesting:

Depending on whether the bean is a snap, shell, or dry variety will impact when and how the bean should be harvested.

Harvesting snap beans is an ongoing process. You can start to harvest anytime, but gardeners usually wait until the beans begin to firm up and can be snapped. They are generally about as thick as a pencil then. Don't wait too long, because beans can become overgrown and tough almost overnight. Harvest by gently pulling each bean from the vine or by snapping off the vine end, if you are going to be using the beans right away.

Snap beans are harvested while the pod and enclosed seeds are still relatively immature. Compared to the other two types of beans, snap beans have the smallest window for an ideal crop. Beans that are harvested too early will not develop the proper flavour and texture. On the other hand, beans that are allowed to develop on the plant too long will be tough and somewhat unpalatable.

Perhaps the best simple indicator for snap beans is the diameter of the pods. Generally, most varieties will yield the best snap beans with a diameter between 3-6mm. Of course, the best way to determine suitability for harvest is to sample a pod or two before making a complete harvest. It is worth noting that many varieties of snap beans that are allowed to develop completely also make good dry beans.

Shell beans are harvested at a later time than snap beans, once the pods have started to fill out and the enclosed seeds developing inside are apparent. Beans of these varieties are removed from pods and are often eaten fresh, but are sometimes dried.

Dry beans are not harvested until the pods and enclosed seeds have reached complete maturity, and will often require threshing to remove extraneous pod material. When growing dry beans, it is especially important that growing plants have plenty of space and ventilation so that pods will dry out properly. If experiencing a spell of rain late in the season once pods have matured, plants can be removed from ground and hung upside down indoors to allow drying to continue.

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