

Seed Saving Guideline No. 6

Peas

Pisum Sativum

Family: *Leguminosae*

There are three groups of peas. **Smooth-seeded** peas are starchier and hardier than **wrinkled-seeded** peas; **edible-podded** peas are more commonly known as sugar peas or mangetouts. Most peas today are eaten fresh, but some are grown for drying. Pea flowers are perfect and self-pollinating. The flowers open early in the morning and do not shut. The anthers shed pollen the night before the flower opens, but this does not reach the stigma until the flower is tripped, usually by the wind.



Growing & Roguing

- Peas being grown for seed should be grown as you would for an edible crop. However, you should make sure the growing season is as long as possible to allow the pods to mature and dry.
- As peas are inbreeders (that is, they self-pollinate), you can save seed from just a few plants – it is better, though, if you grow as many plants as possible (preferably around ten).
- Some plants may produce noticeably different foliage or pods from the majority of the plants; you should not save seed from these atypical plants and they should be removed.
- Like French and runner beans, the characteristics of the pea seed – its size, shape, colour and markings – should be more or less uniform and the same from generation to generation. There will be no visible signs of crossing until the second generation, so if you notice changes in characteristics go back to the seed saved from two harvests previously, which should be pure.

Pollination & Isolation

Peas are generally self-pollinating and the likelihood of cross-pollinating is low. However, insects do visit pea flowers and can cause crossing. Commercial seed growers recommend a minimum separation of 20m, which is not really practical for the home seed saver, but try to leave as great a distance as possible. Crossing can be very difficult to detect as peas look so similar, so it is best to grow one variety at a time.

Harvesting

Peas mature very quickly and can be left on the vine to dry. If there is a risk of frost to a crop that is almost mature, lift the entire plants and hang them inside somewhere warm until the pods are completely dried.

Cleaning

It is best (if not dealing with large quantities) to pod peas by hand. However, larger quantities can be threshed. This can be done by putting the pods into a pillowcase or sack and treading on them or bashing them with a rolling pin; or by shaking the vines vigorously inside a plastic dustbin. Seeds threshed this way will need additional cleaning by winnowing.

Winnowing is best done outside in a stiff breeze. Pour the seed steadily from one container to another, allowing the wind to blow the chaff away. Do this over a tarpaulin, in case a sudden gust wafts away the seed. Repeat until all the chaff has gone and only seeds remain.

If necessary, set the pea seeds out to dry further and remove any that are damaged or discoloured.

You may notice small holes with a powdery deposit round them in some of the seed. This is a sign of pea moth, which lay their eggs on pea flowers. The caterpillars then eat their way out of the pods, often eating a few of the pea seeds in the process. If you notice signs of pea moth in harvested peas, you should pod them immediately or they will continue to be eaten. To avoid this pest avoid having peas in flower in June/July as pea moths are at their most active at this time.



Pea moth larvae

Storage

Store in a cool, dry place. Pea seeds should last in storage for at least three years.

Returning Seed to HSL

It is vital that seed returned to HSL is not cross-pollinated. So not send seed to us that you suspect might have crossed.

Seed must be completely dry and fully cleaned. Seed that retains moisture can go mouldy in transit and will have to be discarded. It can take a few days for seed to get to us in the post so pack seed in breathable material, e.g. a paper envelope or cotton bag, and place it in a padded envelope or stout box to protect the delicate seed from impact damage.