

Green Tips

Plant and Grow Guides

Garden Beans (GT 104)

For more information and other helpful educational materials, contact:

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Garden beans, both snap and lima, are among the favorites in many vegetable gardens. Some home gardeners will also grow dry beans if they have the room in the garden and have a desire to use them when cooking. These beans also include pole beans wax beans, French and Romano beans. Beans should be cooked so they do not cause digestive problems.



Michigan has the reputation of being the second largest producer of dry beans in the country. All these garden beans can be grown in Michigan:

Bush beans or green beans -bush bean varieties are well suited to smaller gardens and are easier to grow because there is no trellising. They come in both green and purple varieties. Yellow wax beans are a form of these beans, having yellow color.

Pole beans or climbing beans -these beans grow as a vine that needs support and can grow 5 - 8 feet tall. Both bush and pole beans are harvested when the pods are expanded but the beans inside are not visible.

Lima Beans -see Green Tips, “Lima Beans and Okra,” number GT 108 in this series.

Shell or pod beans -these are dry bean varieties that are eaten when the beans in the pod are plump and mature but still soft. They are shelled like peas because the pod is too tough to eat and then cooked.

Edible soybeans -also called Edamame (“meaning “pods on a branch” in Japanese) are different than field soybeans used in livestock feed. Edible soybeans have larger seeds, a milder taste, are more tender and digestible. These soybeans are eaten when the shells are green and the soybeans inside are plump. This is similar to eating shell or pod beans because of the stage of maturity when they are picked. They are traditionally cooked in boiling salted water and the tough outer pod is removed. Soybeans should be cooked to receive all the nutrients.

Dry beans -dry edible beans come in a variety of kinds. The pods are grown to maturity and harvested when dry, at the end of the season. These include kidney beans, navy beans, pinto beans and black beans. Cannellini beans are white kidney beans. Other varieties belong to the heirloom or heritage category; they have been grown for more than 50 years. These include Jacob’s Cattle, Vermont Cranberry and Dragon’s Tongue, to name just a few.

Other notable family members:

Romano -these are either bush or climbing beans that form smooth, flat string-less pods, and essentially flat snap beans. They come in green, yellow or purple varieties. Romano beans can be used fresh like green beans or left to mature and used like dry beans.

French or haricot vert -these resemble green beans but have long, slim, flavorful pods. They can be found in bush and climbing varieties. They are eaten fresh.

GROWING BEANS

Beans do best in sandier, loose, well-drained soil with some organic matter and a soil pH of 6.5. They are considered a full-sun crop with at least 8

hours of sun per day. Beans are tender crops that need warm soils or seeds fail to germinate or plants to grow. Soil temperature at the time of planting is critical. The soil temperature should exceed 60 degrees, which is often found at the end of May. Seeds may not germinate or plants appear deformed when trying to grow in cold soil. The soil temperature is taken in the top inch of soil early in the morning before the sun has warmed the soil for the day. Plant seeds at two week intervals to guarantee harvests throughout the summer of fresh beans.

Fresh beans, depending on the variety, grow to maturity in 45 -72 days. Most bush bean varieties can be picked after 55 - 60 days. Do not pick beans when it is wet or dewy in the morning. It is possible to spread viral and bacterial diseases by breaking tiny, moist leaf hairs and touching other plants.

PLANTING -follow the directions on the seed package as to depth and spacing. If growing climbing beans, be prepared to supply sturdy trellising or poles to support the crop.

WATERING -Keep plants well watered, especially when it is dry. But be careful not to cause the soil to become waterlogged. Mulch plants only after seeds have germinated and are growing well, which may be early to mid summer. Beans require warmer soils than many vegetables.

FERTILIZATION -follow soil test recommendations but only fertilize lightly with nitrogen. Beans and other plants in the legume family can get nitrogen from the air.

WEED MANAGEMENT -controlling weeds around beans is essential to getting a good crop. Weeds compete successfully for water, nutrients and sunlight. Hoe or cultivate to control weeds but be careful not to disturb bean roots by working too closely to the plants.

