

Anyone Growing Peas?

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Peas may well be our favourite vegetable. Some have suggested I might even be addicted to fresh peas because I am shameless in anyone else's pea garden. I'm not talking about those snap peas where one eats the fibrous shell. I'm talking about those beautiful, big, sweet green balls that get shelled and eaten fresh in great quantities.

My goal for the last five years has been to eat peas by April Fool's Day, but I never seem to succeed. I suppose I am successful at being an April fool for trying though. Last year I tried a couple tricks to coax one batch into flowering earlier but the best I could do was May 6. It normally takes about two months of growing for a pea plant to produce a pea but this year will be much longer due to cold, cloudy weather.



We grew four different experimental batches last year with one method being more successful than the others. We measure success by the number of peas per plant we can harvest. Batch #1 had 20 peas per plant, Batch #2 and #4 had a whopping 50 peas per plant and Batch #3 had none. I thought perhaps I'd share some detail about Batch #2 and #4.

Batch #2 was started in April in flats and kept warm and safe for a month. They were then transplanted into 10 big, two gallon pots. The soil is a rich mix of horse manure covered by leaf mould topped with a good mix of compost and soil along with home made organic fertilizers. They grew in bright sunlight on our deck until they showed signs of summer stress, then they were moved into partial sun of a cool breezeway and watered well. The pots worked great because when they were moved into the cooler breezeway the peas

seemed to revive and produced a new second flush of flowering.

There were two plants per pot that grew to about four feet up a trellis made from an old fish net. They were tall, bushy and produced great peas in those pots. Batch #2 plants matured and stopped producing after six weeks of growth. Batch #4 was started on June 1 and went until the end of September.

Batch #3 was disappointing. Sowing seeds in the ground is always a risk for any tender plant because everything eats them. Between the Pill Bugs, the White Crowned Sparrows and slugs, an entire row ended up being just a bunch of stubby, chewed up plants that never amounted to anything.

We only grow two strains of heritage peas from our own seed and we time them to grow in separate batches so they can never cross-pollinate and lose their uniqueness. One came to Canada in the 1800s and was kept pure at the National Historic Site of the Bar U Ranch in southern Alberta. It is a non-hybridized strain that provides the sweetest and plumpest peas ever and has become our favourite.

The other pea variety we grow came from the oldest farm in the Yukon where the farmer claims the seeds have remained pure since the 1960s – the Pelly River Farm. These are interesting in that they are not grown on a trellis but are allowed to spread out on the ground. They are super sweet as well but not as robust as the other.

Three years ago one individual pea was found to be somewhat elongated like a bean and bigger than all the rest in the pod. It sprouted into a robust Siamese Twin and the weaker sprout was cut off. The main stem then grew like a wolf with huge leaves, stems and even the peas were bigger but just as sweet. I saved almost all the peas from that rogue and grew several dozen plants that also turned into giants. Now it has become our own strain of giant pea that we have dubbed the Samson Pea.

This year is not shaping up to be a good year for peas so far. Although seeds from both the Samson Pea and the Pelly River Peas have been planted for some time now, the plants are tiny and weak due to persistent winter temperatures as well as dark, cloudy and wet conditions. It is April 10 and time for a third batch to be sown indoors. These will be the peas we eat at the middle of June.