

## Sweet Peas and Other Seeded Plants

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For many years sweet pea growers described the attractive, fragrant flower as difficult to grow because it did not tolerate extremes of hot weather or cold weather. I don't know if climate change is the cause but over the last 3 years sweet peas have done very well in San Antonio. I attempted to get a sweet pea section included in the new "San Antonio Plan to Address Climate Change" but I seemed to be the only one excited about it!

Sweet peas are desirable to grow in your landscape because they have beautiful flowers that attract attention in the flower garden with both basic colored (red, white, purple) and pastel colored (pinks, lavenders) flowers. The blooms also have a pleasant fragrance, not as potent as stocks in the winter garden, but close. Like stocks, you will notice the fragrance of the sweet pea as you near their planting in the garden. Sweet peas also make an excellent cut flower. Bouquets last a relatively long time and perfume the area around them for the whole period.

Plant sweet peas by seed in full sun against a trellis in soil that has been enriched with compost and slow release lawn fertilizer. If you do not have a permanent trellis, most area nurseries offer portable trellises that you insert into the soil with foot pressure. Use one or more of these trellises to create a sweet pea area at one or both ends of your raised bed gardens. Tomato cages also work in a pinch.

Packets of sweet pea seeds are available at most nurseries. There is even a bush version that does not require a trellis, but it is not as impressive as the vining selections. Soak the seeds overnight before planting them 4 inches apart and .5 inches deep in front of the trellis.

Sweet peas usually germinate quickly but they can be slow to develop if the temperatures are warm or cold. If they start blooming in February or March expect them to last until the end of May. You can collect the seed for planting next year or let it drop for reseeding in place. Collect the seed when the pods begin to brown. If you wait too long, they twist open and drop the seed.

Based on the response that we get to seeding sweet peas on the radio show, "Milberger's South Texas Gardening", many gardeners like to use seeds to grow plants in at least part of their garden. If that is your situation, you need a winter vegetable garden. Use transplants for the broccoli and other cabbage related plants, but seed English peas, lettuce, carrots, beets, rutabaga, turnips, and radishes.

Prepare the soil with compost and slow-release lawn fertilizer just like sweet peas. It is also important that the soil be moist. If it has not rained within the week, sprinkle or hand water the soil so that the new seed will be in contact with moist soil.

Plant English peas just like the sweet peas including soaking the seed overnight. Large tomato cages work well for trellises for English peas. The key to successful lettuce seed germination is to put the seed on the soil surface, do not cover it. The same rule works well for carrots. Obtain spacing information and other guidance for growing vegetables from seed from the seed packet, plantanswers.com or a vegetable gardening resource like Sam Cotner's "The Vegetable Book".