

# Sugar Snap Pea

## History

Peas have been grown and eaten for thousands of years. Peas have been found in historical sites dating nearly 10,000 years old. There are three possible locations that peas are thought to have originated from: Thailand and Burma, the Middle East, and Ethiopia. Regardless of where they originated from, the cultivation of peas spread throughout Europe, India, and China about 4,000 years ago. Ancient Greeks and Romans cultivated many varieties of peas. The Romans most likely took them to Britain while the Roman Empire covered much of Europe. They were very important to people throughout Europe, especially during the winter months.

Dried peas could be stored and eaten throughout the winter when other food was scarce.

Christopher Columbus planted peas in the Americas in 1492. The American Indians cultivated them soon after. They also were grown by European colonists and later by the pioneers traveling to the west.



## Pea Pods

Peas are a member of the legume family. Legumes produce pods that enclose fleshy, edible seeds. There are two main kinds of peas and they are based on their pods.

**Green (or garden) peas** have sweet, full-sized seeds, but the pods are not edible. After they are harvested, the peas are shelled and only the soft, seeds are used.

**Edible-pod peas** produce peas that are encased in pods that do not need to be shelled. The pods contain seeds that are not fully developed, so when the entire pea pod is eaten, it is tender and sweet. The two main types of edible-pod peas are sugar snap peas and snow peas.

## Fun Facts

- Sugar snap peas were developed in 1979.
- Edible pea pods have fibers that go in only one direction, allowing them to be easily chewed.
- Only 5 percent of peas grown are sold fresh.
- Thomas Jefferson planted more than 30 varieties of peas in his garden.
- Half of the sugar content of peas will turn to starch within six hours if kept at room temperature after harvest.



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