



Know What You Grow!



Sweet Pea

Scientific Name: *Lathyrus odoratus*

Recommended Varieties: Sweet peas are grown in every color except orange and yellow.

- *L. odoratus* is an annual. Bush varieties grow from 8 inches to 3 feet. Vining types grow to 5 feet or more.
- Shorter bush or dwarf varieties, including "Supersnoop" types, make a colorful hedge in a flowerbed.
- Taller climbing varieties, such as "Old Spice Mix" or "Royal Family" can be trained to cover fences and trellises.

Pests/Diseases: Aphids are the most common pest, sucking sap out of the plants, reducing growth. Mosaic Virus is spread by greenfly, causing yellowing of leaves, distortion of new shoots, and inhibited flowering.

[Wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org)

Growing Information

Annual/Biennial/Perennial

Sweet peas are an annual or perennial depending on the variety. They bloom from spring to early summer.

Ideal Planting Window

Inland Valleys and Desert: Plant between early fall and earliest winter.

Sweet peas can be started early indoors. To do so, place a dampened paper towel flat in a container. Spread the sweet pea seeds on the damp paper towel. Cover the container with plastic film and leave overnight. The next day the seeds should be moist. This process softens the seed coat and speeds up the sprouting process.

Growing Guidance

Choose a well-drained site and prepare the bed by applying a thick layer of compost and a natural fertilizer. Sweet peas are happiest with their heads in the sun and their roots deep in cool, moist soil. When possible, plant low-growing annuals in front to shade their roots.

NAPA Master Gardeners



Fun Flower Facts

Sweet pea is a flowering plant in the genus *Lathyrus* and in the Fabaceae family, so it is related to fava beans and other legumes.

The first sweet peas had relatively small flowers but possessed a powerful and attractive fragrance.

The sweet pea became a floral sensation in the late Victorian era.

In the language of flowers, a bouquet of sweet peas meant “goodbye” or “thank you for a lovely time.”

English gardeners fondly call the sweet pea the “Queen of Annuals.”

Sweet peas are self-pollinating. They fertilize themselves while the flower buds are still young and have not yet opened.

Although the seed pods look like Snap Pea pods, they are not edible and can be toxic if ingested in quantity.

You can save the pods and seeds to produce plants for the following year. Keep in mind that the seeds may not produce plants that are the same color as the parent plant.

[Oregon State University](#)

Contact Information



RIVERSIDE COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

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Pollinators/Beneficial Insects

Many flowers have complicated structures which allow them to be pollinated by only one type of insect. The sweet pea is an excellent example. **Its flower structure allows only the bee to enter** because other insects do not have the correct size or mass.

The petals of the sweet pea flower are not alike. At the bottom of the flower there are two petals joined together to form a boat shape, called the keel. It is inside the keel that the stamens, stigma, and style are located. The nectar is stored just over the filaments of the anthers.

When the bee enters the flower, its mass pulls down the keel and the anthers or the stigma move up and touch the underside of the bee's body. In this way the bee gains access to the nectar and carries away pollen.

[The Open Door](#)

Suggested Use



Sweet peas are great as a cut flower and will add color and fragrance to your classroom or home. They bloom again very soon after cutting. **In fact, this makes the plants thrive, and the more you cut them the more they will flower.** The result is vases full of flowers throughout their growing season.

[Little Green Space](#)

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