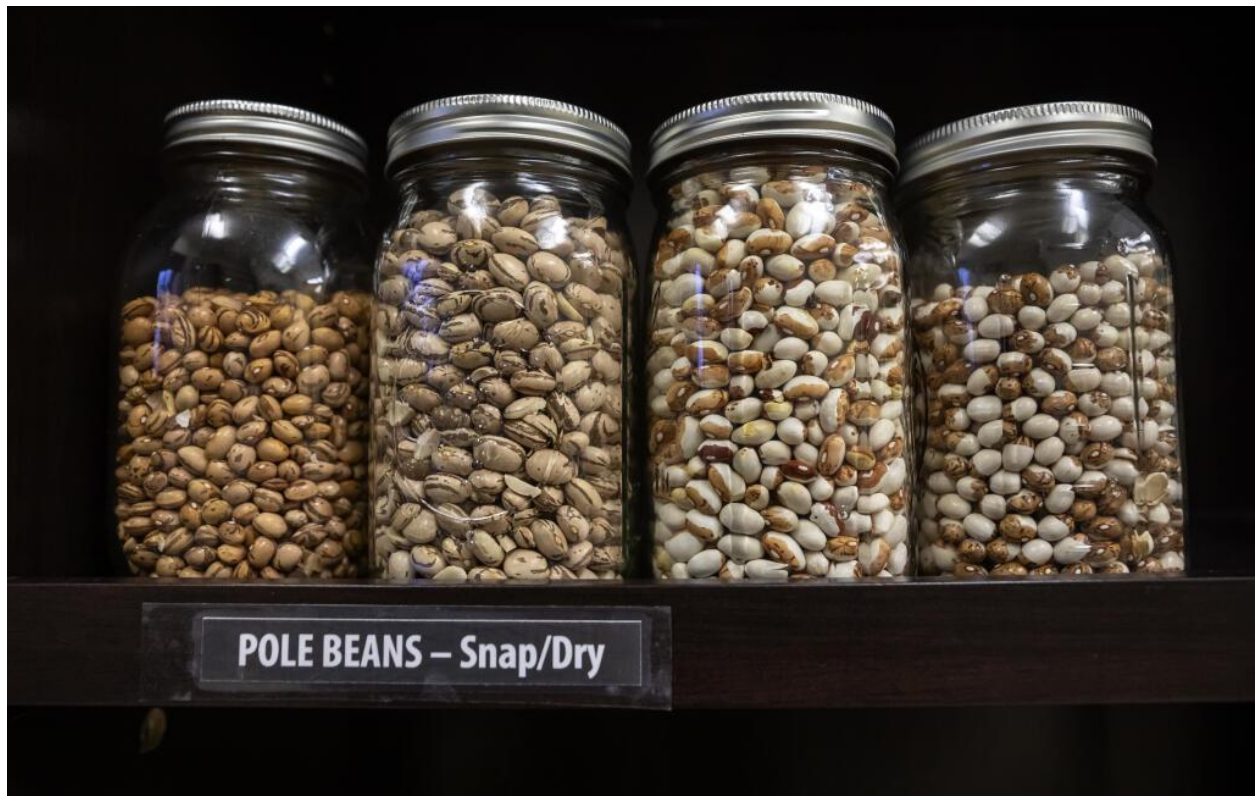


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How to harvest, store beans

By SONOMA COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS
FOR THE PRESS DEMOCRAT



Pole Beans in the library at the Seed Exchange at St. Stephens Episcopal Church in Sebastopol.
Chad Surmick /The Press Democrat

Question: In our family garden we have grown many types of beans. For the first time this year we're growing beans that can be dried for long-term storage.

We would appreciate any information you can provide on how to harvest, shell and store our beans.

Dried beans are primarily shell beans grown specifically for the seed or bean inside the pod. Popular varieties of these beans include black, red kidney, cannellini, cranberry, lima or pinto beans. Fresh shell beans are young, tender, sweeter and creamier than dried beans.

When left on the plant, shell beans mature past the fresh eating stage to ultimately dry while inside the pod. Other beans that we eat fresh, commonly called green or

snap beans, can also be dried for the beans inside. However the quality and taste might not be comparable to shell beans.

Harvest dry beans when their pods are crinkly and brittle and the seeds inside the pod are hard. Sometimes you can hear them rattle when you shake the pod. If the forecast calls for wet weather, harvest the whole plant and hang it upside down to dry in a protected area. Be sure to harvest beans before the pods split on their own and send seeds into the garden to plant themselves.

To remove the dried beans, people traditionally crack the dried seed pods open with their hands. You can also break open the pods by stomping on them in a container with sides or by swatting a burlap bag full of beans with a stick, a technique known as threshing. A threshing machine uses rollers to break the pods and release the beans. Beware, this last method can send beans flying through the air.

Depending on storage conditions, dried beans can last a very long time, even many years. For the longest storage time, put beans in airtight containers and store them in a dark and dry area at around 70 degrees. Glass jars or other containers with tight fitting lids or thick sealed bags are suitable. Little oxygen absorbers (packets with silica gel) inside the containers could increase shelf life for up to ten years.

You can savor dried beans after they have been soaked overnight and thoroughly cooked. Explore your options for cooking once you have grown, harvested and shelled your beans. Countless books contain recipes for dried beans from cultures throughout the world. Dry beans could become regular crops in your garden. Enjoy!

Beans, the Multi-talented vegetable: <https://tinyurl.com/b8hupa88>

Dried Beans versus Fresh Shelled Beans: tinyurl.com/25barcd9

Growing Guide to Beans: tinyurl.com/ykpauz7k

Contributors to this week's column were Sue Lovelace, Patricia Decker and Karen Felker. The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County sonomamg.ucanr.edu/ provides environmentally sustainable, science-based horticultural information to Sonoma County home gardeners. Send your gardening questions to scmgpd@gmail.com. You will receive answers to your questions either in this newspaper or from our Information Desk. You can contact the Information Desk directly at 707-565-2608 or mgsonoma@ucanr.edu.