

How To Grow Sweet Peas

Sweet Peas can be sown in the Autumn; however, you can also sow the seed in late January to February.

Sow the seed separately in multi-purpose compost in plastic or fibre sweet pea tubes or 5" root trainers, though some people use toilet roll or kitchen roll centres). They will need a small amount of warmth to germinate, but not a propagator – a window sill will do.

Once they have germinated, put them in a cold frame or a cold greenhouse. Watch out for slugs and snails and protect them with bubble wrap if the weather gets very cold, say below minus 3 or 4°C and uncover them when the temperature rises again.

March/April: When the weather conditions are right, plant out the seedlings 8"/20cm apart and give each plant an 8' cane and support them as you would grow runner beans. At this time, you could sow sweet peas direct in prepared ground.

Pinch out the growing tip when you have more than 4 leaves and tie loosely to the cane; watch out for slugs and water if dry.

For exhibition sweet peas: You need to grow on the cordon system. When the plants are about 12"/30cm tall, restrict the growth to 1 strong shoot by cutting or nipping out the extra shoots and tie it in to the can (or use sweet pea rings). As the plant grows, you must nip out the side shoots which form at every leaf axil, and keep tying the main stem to the cane as necessary. You should also remove the twisty tendrils as they show – it is like growing tomatoes. Do not let the flowers set seed – cut them as they open, which means 1 flower per plant every day or every other day, depending on the weather.