

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 01-28-04) Peas Glorious Peas, ©2005

One of my favorite childhood memories is sitting on my Great Aunt's porch shelling peas and popping the sweet green orbs into my mouth. My current favorite memory is the sensory luxury of the heavenly scent of the fragrant jewel-colored sweet pea bouquets Joanie Hooper grows in her garden in Poulsbo to share with friends each year.

It's nearly time to plant peas and sweet peas. These cool season plants can be planted in late February to early March and sometimes again in the fall. If we have really wet and cool weather during their first few weeks of growth they'll sometimes mold and fail to grow. You might have to plant again so either purchase twice as many seed packets or only plant out half at a time. I'm going to try the following Ed Hume pea varieties in our Raab Park P-Patch Garden this spring.

Eclipse is a new generation of 'Super Sweet Garden Peas,' Oregon Sugar Pod II is an edible pod variety; and Sugar Snap (Pole) won the All-America 'Gold Medal' award. Eclipse grows as a bush to about two to three feet high taking 63 days to maturity. The peas are ideal for cooking, freezing or eating fresh. Plant them near some support even though they're a bush variety.

Oregon Super Pod II was developed by Oregon State University with pods four to four and a half inches long. Plants grow two to two and a half feet high with 60 days to maturity. They too like a low trellis for growth. Plant Sugar Snap (Pole) as early as you can since it takes 70 days to mature.

I tried to find some definitive literature on the toxicity of ornamental Sweet Peas but failed. However, you'll want to plant them away from your eating peas just to be safe since many folks say they can be poisonous to kids. I'd like to hear from you readers if you know anything about the toxicity of these deliciously fragrant and colorful plants.

The Ed Hume varieties I'll try this year are: Sweet Pea 'Old Spice' (reaching five feet high and needing trellising support); Sweet Pea 'Supersnoop' a low growing plant (needing no support); and Dwarf Sweet Pea 'Little Sweetheart.' 'Old Spice' has smaller flowers with fragrance to make up for its diminutive aspects. 'Supersnoop' is recommended for borders or planter boxes. I'm going to put some in rectangular pots on my porch. Ed says these sweet peas are "extremely easy to grow." 'Little Sweetheart' is fragrant and heat resistant, is low growing and needs no support. The vines grow about one foot and it's recommended for containers.

Joanie Hooper agreed to let me share her sweet pea growing secrets. She soaks her seeds for a few hours, digs an eight-inch to one-foot deep trench, spreads a layer of corn meal (either from the grocery store or feed store) in the trench and finally spreads the seeds, quite thickly, along the top of the corn meal, covering the seeds with a thin layer of soil. As the plants start sprouting she keeps layering on the soil a bit at a time around the plants as they grow. Joanie prefers the vining sweet peas and strings twine between a

wooden frame for the plants to grow. The sweet peas grow along the side of her west-facing house. Maybe her plants are happy with the heat provided by the trench, the sunshine from the west and the protection of her house. But, also, Joanie just has the magic touch with sweet peas.

Ed Hume provided twelve tips on successfully growing sweet peas and eating peas. If you email me at ptillery@co.kitsap.wa.us I'll email you a copy of his tips. Or you can call the Extension Office at 337-7157 and we can mail you a copy of his tips.

He recommends many of the ideas Joanie uses. Peas need nitrogen fertilizer or rich garden soil. Sometimes if the soil is really rich the bush and dwarf varieties become tall so don't worry if that happens to you. Ed also says, "Plant the seeds running north to south to maximize the sunlight and heat." Also recommended is a nitrogen inoculant for the eating peas. You can find nitrogen inoculants at your favorite garden store. Another tip is to till in the vines when they die back or compost them. They'll add nutrients into your soil or compost.

This will be my first year growing peas and sweet peas. I hope you'll also try your luck at these quick growing, very satisfying plants. They're good for your body and good for your soul. Happy Gardening.