PRODUCTION GUIDELINES / SOUTH AFRICA

Peas



CHOOSE THE TYPE. PICK TENDER. COOL PROMPTLY.

Practical guidance for shelling, snow and sugar snap peas, with a separate processing pathway and a focus on tenderness and prompt cooling.

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TYPE & SEASON

Start with the selling format

Scope: edible Pisum sativum peas. This guide focuses on fresh pods and green peas; dry-grain production and pea shoots need their own harvest and handling plans.

Decision / crop	Practical guidance
Shelling / garden peas	The seed is eaten and the pod is discarded. Pick when seeds have filled but remain sweet and tender. [1]
Snow peas / mangetout	The whole flat pod is eaten. Pick before pronounced seed swelling. [6]
Sugar snap peas	The fleshy whole pod is eaten. Allow filling but harvest before the peas turn starchy and the pod becomes tough. [6]
Processing peas	Agree cultivar, maturity measurement, harvest method and delivery interval with the processor before sowing. Do not assume one tenderometer value fits every contract.
Growth habit	Match bush or climbing habit to support, access and harvest labour. Keep cultivar and seed-lot records. [1]

Plan for cool growth

UMN gives about 13-18°C as favourable growing temperatures. Young plants tolerate light frost better than flowers and pods; heat shortens the quality window. Use local weather and cultivar experience, not northern-hemisphere planting dates. [1]

Reserve harvest capacity

Plan how much can be picked, cooled and dispatched each day. Repeated sowings can spread supply, but warming weather may bring separate sowings into harvest together.

Before ordering: pea type / buyer grade / local cool-season window / support system / picking team / cooling route / delivery frequency.

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ESTABLISHMENT

Build an even stand

Inspect the seed lot, prepare drainage and measure the planted area. Seed mass alone does not establish the final population.

Prepare a workable seed zone

Use a well-drained seedbed and test soil before amendments. A soil pH of about 6.0-7.5 is a published reference, subject to local interpretation. Avoid sowing into saturated low spots or a compacted bed. [1, 4]

Decision / crop	Practical guidance
Sowing depth	The commercial guide uses roughly 25 mm as a reference, with adjustment for dry soil. Check placement and moisture with the actual seed and equipment. [2]
Spacing	Choose row width and seed density for cultivar, support and hand or mechanical harvesting. Do not transfer a dense processing stand to a climbing fresh-pod crop.
Seed quality	Check germination, lot count and treatment. Handle seed gently; record emergence and inspect failed seed before diagnosing the cause.
Support and access	Install supports before vines need them. Keep routes wide enough for picking without crushing plants or dragging pods through soil.
Weed control	Remove early competition and cultivate shallowly where appropriate. Protect the surface roots and check any herbicide use against its current label. [1]

Calculate and check the seed order

Example only: 200,000 intended plants / (0.90 germination x 0.85 survival of germinable seed) = about 261,438 seeds. Convert using the supplied seeds per kilogram. This is arithmetic, not a population recommendation.

Stand check: count plants over measured row lengths at several points. Record gaps, crusting, seed rot and uneven depth before deciding whether a patch needs re-sowing.

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WATER & NUTRITION

Support flowers and pod fill

Use soil tests, field history and a measured water supply. A legume crop still needs a planned nutrient programme.

Check nodulation, not assumptions

Peas need compatible rhizobia; bean inoculant is not automatically suitable. Where inoculation is warranted, use a pea-labelled product and follow storage, seed-treatment compatibility and application instructions. High soil nitrogen can suppress nodulation. [3]

Decision / crop	Practical guidance
Nitrogen	Review soil supply, previous inputs and crop performance with an adviser. Do not assume that all peas fix enough nitrogen or that a fixed high starter rate is always necessary.
Phosphorus and potassium	Use the soil report and farm nutrient plan. Avoid routine extra applications when testing shows sufficient supply. [2]
Water delivery	Keep moisture reasonably steady through flowering and pod filling. Include rainfall and check the wetted root zone before changing irrigation.
Drainage	Waterlogged roots and seedbeds increase the risk of rot. Extra water is not the answer to every wilted plant. [4]
Yellow crop	Compare wet and dry areas; inspect roots and nodules and check pests before applying an untested foliar mixture.

Use a simple water-volume check

1 mm over 1 hectare equals 10,000 litres. For example, 12 mm over 0.5 ha equals 60,000 litres at the field surface. Set the required depth from crop and soil observations, then allow for actual system efficiency.

Weekly log: rainfall / irrigation depth and volume / root-zone moisture / flowering and pod fill / nutrient inputs / nodulation observations / next action.

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CROP HEALTH

Inspect vines, roots and pods

Walk representative rows and revisit problem patches. Identify the cause before choosing a treatment.

Decision / crop	Practical guidance
Poor emergence / collapse	Inspect seeds and roots for decay and check wet soil, sowing depth and crusting. Damping-off can kill seedlings before or after emergence. [4]
Wilt or basal lesions	Compare root and stem symptoms with moisture and field history. Obtain a diagnosis to guide rotations and future seed-health decisions. [5]
Leaf and pod spots	Ascochyta-type blights and other diseases can look similar. Record rainfall, splash, affected tissues and distribution before sampling. [5]
White growth / yellow patches	Powdery and downy mildew require different identification. Inspect both sides of leaves rather than treating all pale foliage as a nutrient problem. [5]
Insects and pod injury	Check growing tips and pod interiors for aphids, feeding injury or larvae. Record live pests separately from old damage. [5]

Reduce the next crop’s exposure

Use healthy seed, remove volunteer hosts where appropriate and plan rotations around the confirmed pathogen. Keep crop waste and soil from suspect fields away from clean blocks. Seedling treatment cannot repair an unsuitable wet seedbed.

Protect the frequent harvest

Confirm current South African registration for the pea crop, target and use. Follow label rates, re-entry and preharvest intervals; retain application and picking records and check buyer residue requirements. Foreign spray lists are not local approval. [7]

Scouting record: date / block / crop stage / pest or symptoms / area affected / sample number / decision / earliest permitted harvest / follow-up.

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HARVEST & COOLING

Pick to the correct maturity

Sample the crop frequently as harvest approaches. The correct harvest stage differs between shelling, snow and snap peas.

Decision / crop	Practical guidance
Shelling peas	Sample seeds for size, tenderness and sweetness. A large pod alone does not confirm eating quality. Cool promptly or follow the processor's agreed delivery process. [1, 2]
Snow peas	Select bright green, tender, flat pods with little seed development. Reject yellow, damaged and over-mature pods. [6]
Sugar snap peas	Pick plump, crisp pods while tender. Do not use the flat snow-pea standard, and do not wait for hard mature seeds. [6]
Cooling	Move into shade immediately and cool rapidly towards 0°C. Avoid freezing and measure product temperature, not only room air. [2, 6]
Humidity and moisture	UC Davis gives 95-98% RH for snow and snap pods. High humidity is different from free water; top-icing can promote decay in snap peas. [6]

Deliver quickly and verify the lot

Edible-pod peas are highly perishable; even good cold storage generally provides no more than about two weeks. Plan a shorter selling cycle and inspect retained samples. Use clean packs, avoid crushing and keep lots traceable. [6]

Agree processing maturity separately

Record the buyer's tenderometer or other acceptance method, sampling protocol, harvest slot and maximum delay. A fresh-pod harvest rule cannot define a freezing or canning programme.

Dispatch check: correct type / tenderness / grade / harvest time / product temperature / clean packaging / lot code / delivery slot.

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FILLABLE CROP PLANNER

Your next planting

Save a copy before filling it in. Use a PDF reader that supports forms and keep the completed record with your field documents.

Farm / block / previous crop

Pea type / cultivar / seed lot

Sowing / flowering / planned harvest window

Row layout / support / target stand / area

Buyer / fresh or processing / grade / pack

Soil results / inoculant / nutrient and water plan

Next action / responsible person / due date

Ready-to-plant checks

- [ ] Pea type and buyer agreed
- [ ] Seed and inoculant checked
- [ ] Stand and supports planned
- [ ] Irrigation measured
- [ ] Crop health reviewed
- [ ] Cooling or processor booked

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REFERENCES & EDITION NOTES

Sources you can follow

Independent sources reviewed on 18 September 2026. Links are clickable. Older sources support established principles; overseas dates and product approvals are not transferred to South Africa.

01. UMN Extension - Growing Peas
Cool-season growth, soils and crop-type distinctions.

02. Mid-Atlantic Commercial Recommendations - Peas (2026/27)
Commercial sowing, soil-test planning and rapid cooling.

03. UMN - Mind Your Peas and Beans (updated 2026)
Pea-specific rhizobia, inoculation and nitrogen fixation.

04. UC IPM - Root Rot and Damping Off of Peas
Emergence losses and drainage.

05. UC IPM - Peas
Diagnostic starting points; listed pests are not proof of local occurrence.

06. UC Davis - Snow and Snap Pea Pods (1998)
Edible-pod maturity, temperature, humidity and icing differences.

07. South African Government - Agricultural remedies
Registration framework; verify the current approved crop and use on the label.

About this edition. Original AgriCart editorial synthesis for planning and education. Obtain farm-specific advice before setting inputs and crop-protection programmes. No yield or shelf-life guarantee is implied. Cover image is AI-generated illustration, not a documented farm or named cultivar. Source organisations do not endorse AgriCart.