

GREEN BEANS

A favorite crop to grow and eat is green beans. There are many varieties of bush beans and pole beans. The bush variety will get to a height of 10 to 15 inches tall. Pole beans can reach 8 to 15 feet high. Beans need full sun and are not frost tolerant. They should be planted one to two weeks after the last frost. Try not to disturb the roots after planting as this can hinder their growth. When you thin your beans, cut them off instead of pulling them out. Plant seeds one to one and one half inches deep and four to six inches apart. The seeds should germinate in four to ten days, with fifty-two to seventy days until maturity. Pole beans can take a little longer.

Make sure your beans get at least one inch of water each week, either by rain or by watering, especially during pollination and pod development. Beans are a light feeder, so apply either a slow-acting, general purpose fertilizer or compost in spring. Bush beans should be ready to harvest two to three weeks after they bloom. Pole beans take a bit longer. Harvest before the seeds fill out the pods, when the beans are long and slender. Do not pick your beans when the plants are wet from rain because you could spread disease through the plants. If you want to save seed as in Tar Heel beans, let the pods fill out and dry like paper.

Some of the most common insect pests of beans are aphids. Try just a vigorous spray of water early in the mornings once every other day for three sprayings. If the aphids are really bad, use insecticidal soap and be sure to get the undersides of the leaves, spraying every two or three days until you get them under control. If your beans develop problems, bring samples to the WSU Master Gardener Plant Clinic on Wednesdays from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm in Mount Vernon and in Anacortes on Thursdays at Ace Hardware from 9:00 am to noon.

Beans can be pressure canned, frozen, pickled, dried and, of course, eaten fresh. When dried, shelled beans will keep for several years and you can store bean seed for three years.

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This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Cooperative Extension, 306 S. First, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.
