

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener  
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Probably nothing tastes better than fresh green beans, and they are an easy crop to grow. Beans like warmth so plant when all danger of frost is gone. The soil temperature should be about 60 degrees. Decide on what type of beans you want to plant, bush or pole? If you decide on pole beans you will need to put up supports and this can be done several ways. You can construct trellises or tepees, which the kids and grandkids seem to really enjoy, and maybe you will have help with the bean picking. The supports should go up either at planting time or when the first two leaves appear on the plants.

If you have problems with flea beetles or other pests, cover your plants with row cover until they are large enough to withstand damage. Then set up your supports. Mulching with grass clippings after the seedlings start up is also a good idea. Lay about six inches deep and put a soaker hose under the mulch for easier watering. Try to keep the soil moist but do not over water. This is especially important when the bean pods start to develop. Too much water will cause them to drop their pods. Kelp is an excellent fertilizer for beans and it really gives them a needed boost in developing.

Keep out of the bean patch when it is raining or when your plants are wet even with dew. Disease organisms spread easily in the film of water covering the bean's wet leaves. It is also important to pick when your beans are ready; in fact you may want to pick every day or every other day just to keep your plants productive.

If you plan on canning or freezing beans you can figure that one-half pound of beans will cover a 100-foot row and should give you about 50 quarts of beans. Bush beans should be thinned to 4-6 inches apart and pole beans should be about 6-9 inches apart. Don't be limited by just growing 'Blue Lakes.' Try some other types like: 'Kentucky Wonder,' 'Kentucky Blue,' 'Scarlet Runner,' 'Tar Heels,' 'Yellow Wax,' 'Jacob's Castle,' 'Soldier Beans,' thin French beans ... the list is endless. Beans can be eaten fresh or dried, canned, pickled or frozen. In earlier times they were strung on string and hung from the rafter until they were brittle. They were called Leather Britches. If you are using your beans as shell beans, wait to harvest them until they turn brown and the seeds rattle when you shake the pods. If it is going to rain and they are not completely dry pull up the plant and hang it upside down inside a garage, shed or other out building. When the beans are completely dry remove (shell) them and store in a cool, dry place.

Now you have the makings of bean soup, baked beans, beans and cornbread. The nice thing about beans is they are so versatile. Eat them fresh, can, freeze or pickle some, and dry the rest and any way you fix them-YUM!

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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 Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.

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