

Green Beans—It's Feast or Famine!

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A friend complained that she was tired of picking beans every day and asked what variety only needed to be harvested one or two times a week. Unfortunately, when it comes to beans, the harvest depends more on the weather than the variety. It might be better to try planting different varieties of beans for a more consistent harvest from early summer to the first hard frost in the fall.

If you want to harvest large amounts of beans for freezing or canning, almost any variety will work, but pole beans have higher yields than bush beans. Blue Lake (available in both pole and bush), Kentucky Wonder, and Cherokee Trail of Tears are very popular pole varieties, but there are many others that work well too.

If you prefer fresh beans to eat regularly throughout entire summer here are some suggestions to smooth out the highs and lows, so you can harvest beans steadily from early summer to the first hard frost of fall.

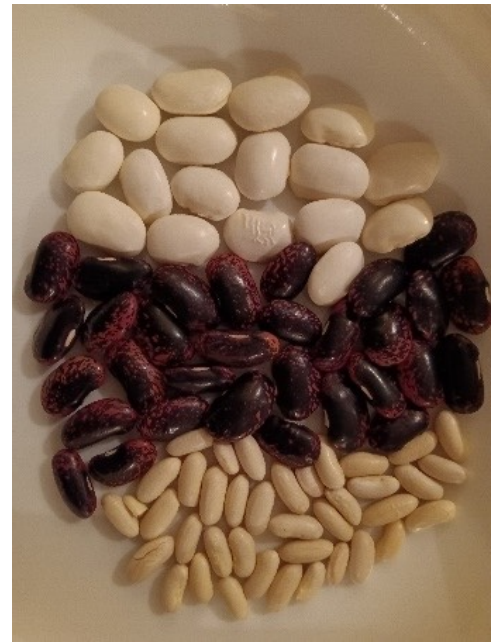
Common bush and pole beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) prefer warm weather and grow rapidly when air and soil temperatures range from 60-85°. When summer temperatures soar, the leaves turn yellow, and yields drop significantly. At this point it's usually better to pull bush beans out but leave pole beans for fall harvests.

For a long-sustained harvest try planting **bush beans** once the weather warms in late spring. Two 8-foot rows spaced 6" apart with seeds in each row also planted 6" apart, should provide enough fresh bush beans for a family of two or three to eat fresh beans a couple of times a week. Beans will be tender, with few strings until the weather gets hot. When temperatures rise above 90 degrees, the leaves will turn yellow, and harvests will drop significantly. Pull out the plants. Then later, around the first of August, plant a second crop for fall. As the weather cools, you will have healthier plants and higher yields than if you left the spring plants. Blue Lake (bush variety), Dragons Tongue, and Red Swan are among many good bush varieties.

During the heat of the summer when common bush and pole beans falter, try planting Asian Yard Long beans (*Vigna unguiculata*). They are a tropical species that loves the heat. There are several varieties, in green, red, and purple. Long beans retain most of their color during cooking. They are thin and about 18 inches long. Long beans will not germinate or grow until temperatures remain above 75 degrees and will grow even better when the heat soars into the 90s. As soon as the nighttime temperatures start to drop, around the first of September, the plants begin to die back and production stops. A double row 8' long will probably produce more than you can eat. When canned or frozen, the texture often turns soft or mushy. Common beans may be a better choice for canning or freezing.



For bean harvests into late fall, try planting runner beans (*Phaseolus coccineus*). **Runner beans** are not the same species as common pole beans or long beans. They are the most common beans eaten in Europe, and include Scarlet, Sunset, Painted Lady, and Buffalo beans. They are very ornamental, with aggressive long vines, covered with loads of red, pink, or white edible flowers that bees and hummingbirds love. They produce very large flat bean pods that are about 9" long, and half an inch wide. Runner beans are very meaty, and firm fleshed. If you grow them to seed, they have large black, white, or dark purple speckled seeds, that are like large lima beans, but have



a very smooth creamy texture. They are good when sautéed but are often cut diagonally in thin julienne strips and eaten raw in salads. Runner beans should be planted in early summer when the nighttime temperatures and soil are both warm. The vines and flowers grow during the summer, but beans do not appear until cool weather. They can be harvested until hard frost. These tend to separate along the lengthwise seam during canning or freezing, so are better when eaten fresh. They also make pickled beans that are good if they are not canned. Instead store the pickled beans in glass jars in the refrigerator for up to 2 months.

For safe canning and pickling recipes check *The New Ball Book of Canning and Preserving* or go to the Ball website at www.healthycanning.com/?s=recipes.

Runner Beans have very large seeds when compared to common pole beans. White seeds from Buffalo Runner bean, purple specked seeds from Scarlet Runner bean, and small white seeds from Blue Lake pole beans.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact our WSU Extension clinic by phone call – 509-574-1604 or email at gardener@co.yakima.wa.us. Or visit Extension at 2403 South 18th St. Suite 100, Union Gap, WA. We are there Mon., Wed., and Fri. from 9 am -12 pm and 1-4 pm.

And the bottom line is always to enjoy “the fruits of your labor”.