

Are tall peas worth the climb?



Tall “podding” peas are out of fashion. For commercial growers, the reasons are clear, but do these peas have a place in the garden? Francis Rayns reports on the response from members who trialled tall pea varieties in a members' experiment.

The peas

Nowadays, most podding pea varieties available to the gardener grow to around 60-70cm high. A few, such as ‘Senator’ and ‘Rapido’ reach 100cm, but only ‘Alderman’, at 1.5m, can really be called tall. Other tall peas on the market are mangetout and snap pod varieties. In this members' experiment, participants trialled ‘Alderman’ (available in seed catalogues), plus three tall varieties from our Heritage Seed Library. Unfortunately the ‘Alderman’ peas germinated very poorly,

due to a problem with the seed we supplied. Most of the results returned related only to the three Heritage Seed Library varieties.

“ Nearly all growers said they would grow tall peas again. ”

The conclusions

Nearly all growers (95%), many of whom had not grown tall peas before, said they would grow them again because the peas:

- were very productive
- made good use of garden space
- were easier to pick than dwarf peas
- provided a nice vertical feature in the garden.

‘Hugh’s Huge’ was the favourite for eating and the tallest growing pea. ‘Clarke’s Beltony Blue’ was the favourite as an ornamental, but the least popular as an edible crop, although the coloured pods made them easy to pick. Many chose this pea as their favourite because of its striking appearance. All varieties were praised by some people, while dismissed by others. The main disadvantage of tall peas was the need to construct a sturdy framework to support the height and weight of the fully-grown plants, especially on a windy day. The need for reinforcement and extra tying in was frequently mentioned.



How tall did they grow?

‘Hugh’s Huge’ topped the list at 1.82m. ‘Simpson’s Special’ came second at 1.77m and ‘Clarke’s Beltony Blue’, third at 1.54m. These figures are probably an underestimate, as in many cases the plants grew much taller than their supports – 3m in some cases.

Were they worth eating?

The peas were eaten both raw and cooked. A few experimenters thought all the peas tasted the same, but as is usual with taste trials, opinions were very varied. Overall, ‘Hugh’s Huge’ scored highest for “pleasantness”. The most disparaging comments – such as “starchy”, “dry”, “metallic”, “tough skinned” – were reserved for ‘Clarke’s Beltony Blue’.

‘Alderman’

Introduced 1891. Grows to around 1.5m (just under 5ft). Flowers white; pods and peas green. Available in seed catalogues.

‘Clarke’s Beltony Blue’

Grown since 1850. HSL variety; donated by Mrs Anderson, whose great grandfather grew it in County Tyrone. Grows to 1.6m (5ft). Flowers bi-coloured – pale pink and rich maroon; pods purple and contain an average of five green peas.

‘Hugh’s Huge’

Thought to have been grown since 1920 or earlier. HSL variety. Grows to 3m (10ft). Flowers white with green veining; pods green and contain six to 10 marrowfat type peas.

‘Simpson’s Special’

At least 40 years old. HSL variety. Grows to 2.5m (8ft). Flowers white; pods green and contain an average of five green marrowfat peas.

For a full report on this experiment, please go to www.gardenorganic.org.uk/tow.