Overwintering Broad Beans and Peas

Long-Range Weather Forecast

The unsettled weather bringing a major frontal system and very high winds across the south of the British Isles this weekend will continue into the early part of next week, with another Atlantic frontal system expected to bring further wet and windy conditions.

The weather is then likely to become less unsettled, with rain and stronger winds becoming more confined to northwestern areas. Drier and calmer conditions are expected to develop across the south and east, bringing a greater chance of chilly nights and patches of morning fog.

A similar pattern is likely to continue into early November, although there is a chance that settled conditions may develop more widely for a time. Temperatures are expected to vary around the seasonal average.

Why Sow Them in Autumn?

The main reasons are:

- Broad beans and peas will be several weeks ahead of those sown in spring.
- They usually produce heavier crops.
- They provide protein-rich, homegrown food during the "Hungry Gap".
- Broad beans can set their pods before blackfly have a chance to attack them.
- The soil benefits from these legumes, whose nitrogen-fixing root nodules help enrich the soil.

What Do We Need to Consider?

The main considerations are:

- If you are growing these crops for the first time, try to find garden soil or compost in which broad beans and peas have previously been grown. This can help inoculate your soil with nitrogen-fixing bacteria.
- These crops prefer well-drained, loamy, humus-rich soils to avoid rotting in excessively wet conditions.
- Sow between October and mid-November, well before the first frosts.
- They can survive light frosts but need protection from severe frosts.
- Most importantly, they need protection from rabbits, mice and pigeons.
- They do not grow well in dry, hot conditions.

- Choose well-proven winter varieties.

Best Varieties

Broad Beans

- **Super Aquadulce:** Organic seed available from Vital Seeds. Exceptionally hardy and one of the most reliable varieties for autumn sowing.
- **The Sutton (dwarf variety):** A compact, sturdy bean that copes well in exposed places and is suitable for smaller beds or pots.

Peas

- **Meteor:** A short, tough variety and one of the hardiest peas, making it one of the safest choices for autumn sowing.
- **Douce Provence:** A sweet, dependable overwintering pea that performs well during cold spells and produces an early crop.
- **Sohara:** A biodynamic variety suitable for indoor sowing in November to achieve the earliest possible cropping.

Growing Tips

Prepare the ground at the beginning of October by forking it over or digging it. Consider creating raised beds to improve drainage.

Add well-rotted, mature compost at a rate of two wheelbarrows per 10 m^2.

Apply the Horn Manure Preparation before sowing to encourage faster germination and rooting.

Choose the best overwintering varieties. To speed up germination, soak the seeds in lukewarm water with a tiny pinch of biodynamic preparation.

Broad beans: Soak for 10–15 minutes with chamomile preparation. Sow immediately afterwards, or as soon as possible on the same day.

Peas: Soak for up to two hours with chamomile preparation. Afterwards, place them in a cloth for 24 hours. This helps ensure the fastest possible germination.

When to Sow

Sow in the morning on fruit days, when the Moon is in a warmth constellation.

The suggested dates are:

- Monday 26 and Tuesday 27 October
- Friday 13 and Saturday 14 November

Sowing Depths and Spacing

Broad beans: Sow approximately 3–5 cm deep and 20 cm apart, in two double rows in a bed 1.20 m wide.

Peas: Sow approximately 2–3 cm deep and 10–15 cm apart, in two double rows in a bed 1.20 m wide.

Cover young seedlings if temperatures fall below 6°C or frosty conditions develop.

Alternatively, sow the seeds indoors in pots four weeks before planting them out, when the young plants are approximately 7–10 cm tall.

Caring for Broad Beans and Peas

- Protect the plants from pests and frost throughout the winter.
- Support double rows of tall broad bean varieties with two or three tiers of string tied to stakes on either side of the rows.
- When the first aphids appear on the tips of broad bean plants, pinch off the affected tips and compost them. Better still, pinch out the tender tips before aphids appear and enjoy them in a stir-fry!
- Support peas with twigs cut from long hazel sticks and branches, inserting them between the double rows.
- When the first flowers open, spray with Horn Silica Preparation in the early morning.

Please share your own tips and tricks for growing peas and broad beans in your biodynamic garden.

Nutritional Benefits of Broad Beans

Last but not least, it is worth mentioning the nutritional benefits of broad beans.

Broad beans are a source of vegetable protein, fibre, iron, folic acid, and vitamins B1 and C.

When eaten fresh, they contain fewer calories and have thinner skins. Dried beans have a higher carbohydrate content and require longer cooking times.

Their nutritional benefits include:

- **Digestive health:** Their fibre supports the intestinal microbiota and helps prevent constipation.
- **Cardiovascular protection:** Low in fat and rich in micronutrients, broad beans help maintain heart health.

- **Prevention of anaemia:** Their iron and folic acid content is particularly valuable in vegetarian and vegan diets.

Baby broad beans, picked early while still very tender, are ideal for delicate dishes, salads and garnishes. Larger beans are often used in stews, casseroles and rice dishes.

With bright autumn greetings,

Hans-Günther

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