



Green beans are practically a no-fail crop. The two types of green beans that are commonly grown in home gardens are pole beans, which climb to heights of 6 feet or more and need the support of a teepee or trellis, and bush beans, which grow no more than 2 feet high. Both are very productive. Begin planting beans after the danger of frost has passed, and repeat sowings every 3 weeks for a summer-long harvest.

1. Prepare. Loosen soil to a depth of about 12 inches using a shovel or tiller. Mix in some compost to condition the soil, and then rake it smooth, removing any large clumps and rocks. There is no need to add additional nitrogen when planting beans.

2. Plant. Sow seeds in full sun about an inch deep and 2 to 4 inches apart, in rows that are about 2 feet apart. Pole beans can be sown in rows along a trellis, or at the base of a bean tower. To keep bush beans coming, plan to sow short rows every couple of weeks, rather than a large amount all at once.

3. Grow. Water soil to keep it moist, and pull weeds that sprout nearby. When bush bean seedlings are sturdy and about 3 inches tall, thin so that young plants stand about 4 inches apart. For pole beans, set up a sturdy support at the time of planting, and thin seedlings to about 6 inches apart. A thin layer of straw mulch will help control weeds and conserve soil moisture.

4. Enjoy. To keep beans productive it's essential to harvest them continually, every couple of days. They are best when harvested at a young, tender size. Steam, boil, or stir-fry for just a few minutes, so that the pods maintain their crisp texture and bright green color. If you have more than you can eat fresh, boil beans for just 2 to 3 minutes, plunge them into cold water, and freeze for winter.



SIDEBAR:

AT A GLANCE



Exposure: Full sun

Planting time: after danger of frost has passed, and at 3 week intervals throughout the summer, until about 60 days before the first fall frost.

Planting depth: 1 inch deep

Spacing in row: Sow beans 2 to 4 inches apart; thin bush beans to 4 inches apart, pole beans to 6 inches apart.

Time to harvest: 50 to 65 days, depending on variety.