



CARING FOR YOUR VEGETABLE PLANTS: BEANS

Beans are tender annual, warm-season legumes that will fix their own nitrogen once a good root system is established. Dried or fresh, shelled or whole, beans are a favorite crop for home vegetable gardens. They are easy to grow, and the range of plant sizes means there is room for beans in just about any garden. Among the hundreds of varieties available, there are types that thrive in most gardens.

All beans belong to the legume family. In general, there are two main bean types: shell beans, grown for their protein-rich seeds, which are eaten both fresh and dried; and snap beans, cultivated mainly for their pods. The two groups are further divided according to growth habit. Bush types are generally self-supporting. Pole beans have twining vines that require support from stakes, strings, wires, or trellises.

Pole type beans come in many varieties, generally bearing over a longer period than bush types and yielding more in the same amount of space because they require trellising. Pole beans are natural climbers but will not interweave themselves through horizontal wires. Many types of homemade trellises work well as long as they provide the needed support. Trellises should be 6 to 8 feet tall and sturdy enough to withstand strong winds and rain.

Transplanting

Most beans grow best in air temperatures of 70° to 80°F, and soil temperature should be at least 60°F. Beans need a sunny, well-drained area rich in organic matter. Pole beans are even more sensitive to cold than bush beans. They also take longer to mature but they produce about three times the yield of bush beans in the same garden space and keep on bearing until the first frost. Since beans do not tolerate root disturbance well, handle the plants gently. Dig the planting holes before you remove the seedlings from the pots, making each hole the same depth as the pot but slightly wider. Move the entire root ball into the planting hole. Water thoroughly, keeping soil moist but not soggy.



Watering

Consistent and adequate irrigation is required for good fruit set and yield. If temperatures are high and soil moisture low, the flowers fail to set fruit, and yields are greatly reduced. Irrigation practices will vary with planting method, soil type, and season. However, more frequent, light drip irrigation is preferable to a heavy, deep-furrow irrigation. Beans tend to be shallow-rooted plants that are sensitive to over irrigation and soils with low oxygen.

Fertilizing

Beans require normal soil fertility. Only fertilize where levels are low. Begin after bean plants are in active bloom and again when pods start to form. Use a light hand when applying high-nitrogen fertilizer or you will get lush plants and few beans.

Harvesting

Snap beans should be kept picked to keep plants producing heavily. Harvest snap beans when the pods are full-sized. The pods will break easily with a snap when they are ready. Seeds should not cause the pods to bulge.

Pest Management

Thorough information on pest management can be read at:

<http://www.ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/GARDEN/VEGES/beans.html>