



## Beans, Beans, For Your Heart...

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Beans, beans, for your heart; the more you eat, the more you – well, never mind! I can't help thinking of that child's rhyme every time I think of beans. Turns out they actually are good for your heart, and contain lots of fiber, protein, and important minerals like iron, for example. There are many different types of beans. Some are grown for fresh eating, some for harvesting of the actual bean seeds, and some for ornamental purposes. Whatever your motive, beans are one of the best and easiest crops a person can grow. Let's focus on the most popular bean for home gardening, the 'green beans', *Phaseolus vulgaris*, although cultivars can be yellow or even purple.

Green beans have two distinct growth habits, bush and pole, and which one you grow depends on your space and personal preference. They both have great tasting varieties. For bush beans, simply plant and you are all set as they will need no support.

Pole types require some sort of support trellis, fencing, pole, or set up strings for them to climb on. A new trick I am using is two cattle panels held together with stainless steel worm-gear clamps (1/4 to 5/8 inch size) to form an "A" frame. I like the four foot high panels that come in either eight or sixteen foot lengths. Use a nut driver to tighten the clamps as flathead screwdrivers can slip and cause injury. Panels are set so they are four feet high. Beans may grow up and over the other side. Some people even use one sixteen-foot piece and make an arbor by bending it in an upside down "U" shape. Either way, I anchor them in place with twelve-inch lag bolts.

As with any vegetable, consider a soil test before planting ([www.soiltest.uconn.edu](http://www.soiltest.uconn.edu)). Beans are a type of legume, and as such have a unique, symbiotic relationship with bacteria. This relationship benefits both partners and is called 'mutualism'. In the presence of bacteria, the beans grow root nodules that give the bacteria a place to live. The bacteria are able to take nitrogen from the air and convert it to a usable form for the plants.

While these bacteria are naturally found in soil, your garden may not have enough present to help your beans unless you have been growing this crop for a few years. Fortunately, inoculants are sold, sometimes in the same displays as the seeds. Inoculants are a powdered form of bacteria that are in a sort of suspended animation. I simply spray my seeds with water and shake on some of the powder. Plant the inoculated seeds about an inch deep, and keep moist and weed free until they are big enough shade out any competition. They are a relatively fast crop, and I have found them to produce in 55 to 60 days.

Try a few varieties each year and then stick with the ones that tasted the best. Unless your beans are hybrids, you might even want to save some seeds to plant the following year. Another characteristic to watch out for is 'stringiness'. The older the beans get, the more likely they are to have a string that is hard to chew where the two halves of the bean pod come together. Pick the beans when young, and select varieties specifically grown to avoid stringiness.

With either the pole or bush beans, you should pick them as they ripen for best results. This will encourage plants to continue to produce more beans. Since beans are capable of crossing with each other, I advise that you isolate different varieties if you want to save seeds from open-pollinated ones. Also, stagger the planting times of different varieties so that they mature throughout the growing season and not all at once. This reduces the chance of crossing if you are saving seeds and extends the harvest too!

Green beans taste great freshly cooked with a little butter and salt. Another interesting recipe is adding garlic, lemon juice and soy sauce. To kick things up a notch, try cooking the green beans with some bacon and onions! To enjoy your beans year round, preserve them by blanching and then storing in the freezer. Dilly green beans are a pickled version enjoyed by many. There is still plenty of time to grow beans this summer so get out there and plant!

For your gardening questions, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu) or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.

