

## SOURCES

- Steve Albert 2009. *How to Grow Peanuts: In How to Grow Legume Plants. Harvest to Table; Plant, Prepare and Preserve.*
- 2013 *Food Gardening Guide: National Gardening Association.* Demand Media, Inc. 1999-2013.
- Prepared by and eHOW Contributor: *How to Harvest Peanuts.*



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**PEANUT  
PRODUCTION**  
A Quick Reference Source



## PLANTING

The peanut or groundnut is a species in the legume or “bean” family (Fabaceae). The peanut is believed to have been originated, domesticated and cultivated in the valleys of Paraguay. It is an annual herbaceous plant growing 30 to 50 cm (1.0 to 1.6 ft) tall. The leaves are opposite, pinnate with four leaflets (two opposite pairs; no terminal leaflet), each leaflet 1 to 7 cm (½ to 2½ in) long and 1 to 3 cm (½ to 1 inch) broad. Peanuts grow best in light, sandy loam soil. They require five months of warm weather, and an annual rainfall of 500 to 1,000 mm (20 to 39 in) or the equivalent in irrigation water.



The pods ripen 120 to 150 days after the seeds are planted. If the crop is harvested too early, the pods will be unripe. If they are harvested late, the pods will snap off at the stalk, and will remain in the soil. They need an acidic soil to grow preferably with 5.9-7 pH.

## CULTIVARS IN THE UNITED STATES

Thousands of peanut cultivars are grown however; there are four major cultivar groups that are the most popular: Spanish, Runner, Virginia, and Valencia. There are also Tennessee red and white groups. Certain cultivar groups are preferred for particular uses because of differences in flavor, oil content, size, shape, and disease resistance. For many uses, the different cultivars are interchangeable. Most peanuts marketed in the shell are of the Virginia type, along with some Valencias selected for large size and the attractive appearance of the shell. Spanish peanuts are used mostly for peanut candy, salted nuts, and peanut butter. Most Runners are used to make peanut butter.

## SPACING

Plant peanuts in the whole shell or in the papery skin surrounding the seed. Place seeds 1½ to 3 inches deep; set seed 6 to 8 inches apart; thin successful plants or set transplants are planted 18 inches apart. Plant peanuts in double rows to save space, staggering the seeds 18 inches apart. Single rows can be spaced 12 to 24 inches apart. When the plants are 12 inches tall, mound earth up around the base



of the plant so that faded flowers can set pegs down into the hill. For a head start on the season, start peanuts indoors in individual biodegradable peat or paper pots which can be set whole into the garden.

## WATER AND FEEDING

Peanuts prefer regular evening watering. The soil must be kept moist until the plants begin to flower. When that happens, begin watering less. Once plants are established, allow the soil to dry between watering. Empty pods, sometimes called “blind” pods, are the result of too much rain or humidity at flowering time. Then prepare planting beds with aged compost; peanuts like other legumes supply their own nitrogen.

## HARVESTING

Prior to harvesting, the plants begin to lose their green color and the leaves turn yellow. This happens because the kernels need the plant’s food supply for their own growth. To know when your peanuts are ready for harvesting, inspect a few pods. The veins inside the mature pods should be a dark color, and the peanut skins will be papery thin and light pink. When the majority of plants are mature, start digging.

Keep in mind when harvesting peanuts the soil should be neither too wet nor too dry. In either extreme, you might lose some of the nuts. The best way to harvest peanuts is by slowly prying up the whole plant with a pitchfork or shovel. Once the plant is out of the ground, gently shake off the loose soil, then place the plant (peanuts facing upward) in a warm, shaded spot with good air circulation. If weather conditions permit, leave the harvested plants exposed for two to three weeks. This allows the moisture content of the peanuts to drop.



## PEANUT STORAGE

Unshelled peanuts are kept approximately nine months under refrigeration. When frozen at 0° F or lower in airtight containers, they keep indefinitely.

Shelled peanuts are kept approximately three months under refrigeration. They keep indefinitely when frozen (blanched and unsalted). To blanch raw, shelled peanuts before freezing, place them in boiling water for three minutes, cool in ice water for three minutes then, drain, package and label.

## USES

Peanuts have many uses. They can be eaten raw, used in recipes, made into solvents and oils, medicines, textile materials, and peanut butter. Popular confections made from peanuts include salted peanuts, peanut butter (sandwiches, peanut candy bars, peanut butter cookies, and cups), peanut brittle, and shelled nuts (plain/roasted)