

PEANUTS

Peanuts are a small vegetable plant resembling a bean plant. Although semi-tropical, the light frosts of early spring, or late fall, do them little harm. However, they do require a long growing season. Through special growing methods, peanuts can be grown with reasonable success in the North.

Varieties

The Spanish red and the Mexican brown peanuts are the most commonly grown in the country. Both do equally well in Kansas. The Mexican peanut is the small variety used chiefly in making "salted peanuts".

Spanish peanuts are usually boiled in oils, or sold roasted in their jackets. They do not produce as abundantly as the Mexican variety, but their flavor is far superior. The Spanish types require a longer growing season.

Culture

Work the soil deep and well, turning in compost, aged manure, or leaf mold if no previous organic materials have been added. Plant about 1½ - 2 inches deep. Shallow planting will encourage quicker growth, and prevent damp rot in case of a cold, wet spring. Plant four kernels to a hill, with hills 18 inches apart in rows two feet apart. Plant peanuts in early May.

Care

Do not be discouraged if plants fail to appear in seven days. If the weather is wet and cold, the kernels may not sprout for two weeks. Germination is quicker in sandy, well-drained soils.

When the plants are six inches tall, begin cultivating to aerate the soil and control weeds. After plants have attained 12 inches, hill the soil high around each plant. Hilling is very important because as the branches grow, the lower leaves drop off and a long, pointed peduncle appears. A peanut pod forms underground at the tip.

After the plants have been properly hilled, mulch between the plants using compost, straw, or grass clippings. The mulch will help to control weeds.

Harvesting

Most of the pods are formed in early September, but they are empty. The kernels will need another month to six weeks to develop fully. Early frosts may darken the leaves of the plants, but the stems will continue to provide food for the nuts to develop. Allow plants to remain undisturbed until around mid-October when heavy frost completely destroys the tops.

At harvest time, lift each bush carefully out of the soil with a garden fork, and shake free of all dirt. Retrieve any peanuts that were broken off in the soil. Pluck the pods from the roots immediately, and place on shallow trays for drying. Later, store filled trays in the attic of your home or garage to dry. Never store in a cool, damp basement where uncured pods will mildew and rot.

When and how to prepare

Peanuts require two months of drying time. They are delicious roasted in their jackets in an oven preheated to 300°. Allow to roast for 20 minutes, then remove immediately and pour out of the hot pan. The nuts will continue to cook for some time after they have been removed from the oven. Therefore, it is always best to undercook. By the time the nuts cool, they will be done.

Saving seed

Pods that have a pleasing yellow color are the fully ripe ones. For further proof, shake each pod near your ear. If a good, loud rattle results, the nut is ripe. Allow seed to remain in the pods until planting time to prevent drying up.

Peanut butter

Roast peanuts in shells in a 300-320° F oven for about 20 to 25 minutes, turning occasionally. Then run them through a blender or food processor to produce a smooth butter and season as needed.

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