

Two peas in a pod

What could be easier than shelling peas? Eating the whole pods, of course. **Mario Depace** reports on the 2009 RHS trials of mangetout and sugarsnap cultivars. Photography by Tim Sandall

THEIR NAMES SAY IT ALL: sugarsnap and mangetout peas are a delicious, mouthwatering combination of sweetness, tenderness and crunchiness.

Mangetout needs no translation: the pods as well as the developing seeds are edible – not to mention the young pea shoots, favoured for use in salads and stir-fries (but which are not often available in supermarkets due to their short shelf life: after just a couple of days they lose their ‘snappiness’).

Mangetouts and sugarsnaps are closely related to ordinary ‘garden’ peas (*Pisum sativum*), the basic difference being the lack of a fibrous inner lining to the pod.

Mangetout pods are flat; they should be picked when seeds are about the size of a peppercorn. Sugarsnaps, like normal peas, have a round pod. At their best when the pod is just starting to swell, they can, if desired, be left to fill out – and be shelled and eaten like normal peas.

Both are relatively easy to grow, with an excellent germination rate, generally near to 100 percent. This speed of growth makes them good for successional sowing. Usually sown from mid-March onwards, they start to crop about 10 weeks later. Picked two or three times a week, to encourage repeat flowering, they crop for about five to six weeks. The average yield of a 3m (10ft) row can be up to 4kg (8¾ lb).

Like most vegetables, mangetout and sugarsnap peas prefer a well-drained, moist, neutral to alkaline soil. They perform best in an open, sunny site and can be sown directly in the ground, provided the soil temperature is at least 5°C (41°F). For an early crop, and to protect them from mice and birds, sow them in pots under cover, in early March; plant out when 10cm (4in) tall.

Once established, they should only need watering in a dry growing season. The extremely vigorous vines require support from pea sticks or netting. They grow to about 110–160cm (3½–5ft), although plant breeders are developing shorter, self-supporting cultivars.

RHS trials

For the 2009 trial at RHS Garden Wisley, the plot was manured in autumn and rotovated in spring. Seeds of 20 cultivars were sown in double rows, 23cm (9in) apart and 3.6m (11ft 9in) long, with wire netting for support, and 90cm (3ft) between entries. In a smaller-scale trial at RHS Garden Rosemoor, eight cultivars were grown; six were also trialled at RHS Garden Hyde Hall and at partner garden East Ruston Old Vicarage, Norfolk.

All cultivars on trial were rated as H3: meaning they need protection from late

frost in the colder parts of the UK. At Wisley, plants were grown in a fruit cage, although its moist shade may have made some cultivars grow taller than usual. A pheromone trap was used to monitor the number of pea moth, whose grubs eat the developing seeds inside the pods. Fortunately there were too few moths to need spraying (see RHS Advice, p574, for more on pests).

Trial cultivars included ‘Oregon Sugar Pod’, a mangetout, and ‘Sugar Ann’ **6**, a sugarsnap. The same cultivars were also used for an RHS Online trial, and grown by children at schools involved in the RHS Campaign for School Gardening. Although online growers preferred the mangetout, the schoolchildren liked both cultivars more-or-less equally.

‘Sugar Ann’ did well in the 2009 trials, but ‘Oregon Sugar Pod’ was judged to have been superseded by newer cultivars, losing its Award of Garden Merit (AGM).

A pair of mangetouts were given AGMs: ‘Oregon Giant’ **8**, with broad pods about 10 x 2.7cm (4 x 1in), and ‘Norli’ **3**, with an early, heavy crop of smaller pods. ‘Snow Sweet’ **4**, a medium-height plant (and the last to crop, almost two weeks after the rest), was recommended for an award, subject to availability.

Early, short-podded sugarsnap ‘Sugar Bon’ **1** gained an AGM. Similar, but with slightly fatter pods, ‘Sugar Ann’ retained its 2000 award, as did late, narrow-podded ‘Delikett’ **5** and tall, mid-season ‘Cascadia’ **9**, with large, thick pods averaging 8 x 1.8 x 1.5cm (3 x ¾ x ½in). If they become widely available, two further sugarsnap cultivars will gain AGMs: late-cropping ‘Sugar Gem’ and semi-leafless ‘Sugar Lace’ **10**, with a good yield of uniform, stringless pods.

Requiring little effort to cultivate or prepare, mangetouts and sugarsnaps are versatile in the kitchen and deserve a place in every cook’s garden. ■

Mario Depace is in charge of the Model Vegetable Garden at RHS Garden Wisley

SWEET AND EASY PEASY

Numbers refer to the following cultivars of mangetout (M) and sugarsnap (SS) pea, grown in the RHS trial in 2009:

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|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 ‘Sugar Bon’ (SS) AGM | 6 ‘Sugar Ann’ (SS) AGM |
| 2 ‘Delikata’ (M) | 7 ‘Kennedy’ (M) |
| 3 ‘Norli’ (M) AGM | 8 ‘Oregon Giant’ (M) AGM |
| 4 ‘Snow Sweet’* (M) | 9 ‘Cascadia’ (SS) AGM |
| 5 ‘Delikett’ (SS) AGM | 10 ‘Sugar Lace’* (SS) |

* (Award of Garden Merit subject to availability)

• For more on this trial, visit www.rhs.org.uk/trials

FOODVEGETABLES

