

How to Grow Chickpeas, Garbanzo Beans

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The chickpea or garbanzo bean is a cool-season annual that requires about 100 days to reach harvest. Sow chickpeas in the garden about the date of the average last frost in spring or slightly earlier. Chickpeas require a long growing season; to get a head start on the season, sow chickpeas indoors in a peat or paper pot several weeks before transplanting out. Set the chickpea and biodegradable pot whole in the garden when the plant is 4 to 5 inches tall.

Description. Chickpeas, also called garbanzo beans and gram, are regarded as beans, but botanically are neither beans nor peas. The chickpea is a tender annual legume, a bushy plant that grows to about 18 inches tall and has pairs of dark green, compound leaflets that look like vetch. Chick peas have swollen, oblong pods to about 1 inch long and nearly as wide that contain one or two large, cream-colored, pea-like seeds each. Flowers may be white or violet colored depending on the variety.

Yield. Grow 4 to 8 chickpeas plants per each household member.

Site. Plant chickpeas in full sun. Chickpeas will grow in partial shade but the yield will be reduced. Grow chickpeas in loose, well-drained soil rich in organic matter. Add aged compost to planting beds in advance of planting. Avoid planting chickpeas where green manures have just grown or in soil high in nitrogen; this will result in green leafy growth, not seed production. Add potassium and phosphorus to the soil.

Planting time. The chickpea is a cool-season annual that requires 100 or so days to reach harvest. Chickpeas are frost tolerant but grow best where daytime temperatures range between 70 and 80° and where night time temperatures do not dip below 65°F. Sow chickpeas in the garden as early as 2 to 3 weeks before the average last frost in spring. Chickpeas require a long growing season; to get a head start on the season, sow chickpeas indoors in a peat or paper pot and transplant the pot and plant whole to the garden when the plants are 3 to 4 inches tall.

Planting and spacing. Sow chickpeas 1½ to 2 inches deep, spaced 3 to 6 inches apart. Thin successful plants to 6 inches apart; cut away thinned plants at soil level with scissors so as not to disturb roots. Space rows 18 to 24 inches apart. Do not soak seed before sowing and avoid heavy watering after sowing to keep seeds from cracking. Chickpeas allowed to grow a bit crowded will offer each other support.

Water and feeding. Keep planting beds evenly moist until chickpeas have pushed through the soil. Water regularly during flowering and pod formation. Avoid overhead watering which can cause flowers and pods to fall off. Mulch when the weather warms to conserve soil moisture. Add aged compost to planting beds in advance of planting. Side dress chickpeas with aged compost at midseason. Avoid adding nitrogen-rich fertilizers to planting beds. Chickpeas, like other legumes, set up a mutual exchange with soil microorganisms called nitrogen-fixing bacteria to produce nitrogen compounds used by the plant.

Companion plants. Potatoes, cucumbers, corn, strawberries, celery, summer savory. Do not plant chickpeas with garlic.

Care. Avoid handling chickpeas when they are wet or covered with heavy dew; this may spread fungus spores. Keep planting beds weed free but cultivate around chickpeas carefully so as not to disturb the plant's shallow root system. Rotate chickpeas and other legumes to add nitrogen to the soil.

Container growing. Chickpeas can be grown in containers 8 inches deep, the space required for a useable crop makes chickpeas a poor choice for container growing.

Pests. Chickpeas can be attacked by aphids, bean beetles, flea beetles, leafhoppers and mites. Aphids, leafhoppers, and mites can be sprayed away with a blast of water from the hose or controlled with insecticidal soap. Look for eggs and infestations and crush them between your fingers and thumb. Pinch out and remove large infestations. Aphids can spread bean mosaic virus. Keep the garden clean and free of debris so that pests can not harbor or over-winter in the garden.

Diseases. Chickpeas are susceptible to blight, mosaic, and anthracnose. Plant disease-resistant varieties. Keep the garden clean and free of debris. Avoid handling plants when they are wet so as not to spread fungal spores. Removed diseased plants; put them in a paper bag and throw them away. Chickpeas are susceptible to many soil-borne diseases; rotating beans so that they do not grow in the same location more than every three years will reduce soil-borne diseases.

Harvest. Chickpeas will be ready for harvest about 100 days after planting. Chickpeas for fresh eating can be picked when pods are still immature and green; they can be eaten like snap beans. For dried chickpeas, harvest the entire plant when the leaves have withered and turned brown; place the plant on a flat, warm surface and allow the pods to dry. Collect the seed as the pods split. Seeds that will barely dent when bitten are sufficiently dry.

Varieties. Chickpea; Garbanzo; Gram; Kabuli Black.

Storing and preserving. Unshelled chickpeas will keep in the refrigerator for up to one week. Dried, shelled chickpeas will keep in a cool, dry place for up to a year. Chickpeas can be frozen, canned, or sprouted.

Common name. Chickpea, garbanzo, gram

Botanical name. *Cicer arietinum*

Origin. Southern Europe and India