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Alternative Opportunities for Small Farms: Southern Pea Production Review¹

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Marketing Situation

In Florida, most southern peas are grown for fresh market sales with prices averaging \$10 per bushel. Yields of 100 to 200 bushels per acre can be expected, with production costs ranging \$300 to \$350 per acre (this does not include land or harvesting costs). Before planting southern peas, develop your market and know where to sell your produce.

Labor and Capital

Most southern pea cultivars (varieties) for fresh market are ready for harvest 75 to 90 days after planting. The pods should be harvested when completely filled, but before they begin to dry. Underdeveloped and irregularly shaped pods should be discarded along with those which are damaged by insects.

Grading and packing peas for market should be done in the shade to avoid internal heating and desiccation of the peas. After grading, fresh peas can be cooled to 45°F with forced air.

Southern peas for processing are harvested mechanically. The processor will designate the stage of maturity and timing of the once-over harvest.

Suitability

Southern peas must be grown during the frost-free period of the year. Although southern peas do grow during the warm, wet summer season in Florida, yields and quality are usually reduced.

Southern peas will grow in most well-drained Florida soils. Although southern peas can tolerate drier soil conditions than most vegetables, highest yields are obtained when about 1 inch of rain or irrigation water is received every 7 to 10 days. Monitor the soil often for adequate moisture and irrigate when it begins to dry.

Planting Situation

Southern pea types and cultivars include: blackeye types (California Blackeye No. 5, Worthmore); Purplehull types (Pinkeye Purplehull, Knuckle, Purplehull, Purple Tip); Crowder and Cream types (White Acre, Texas Cream 40, Floricream, Mississippi Silver, Zipper Cream, and Colossus). These cultivars may differ in pod color, seed color, seed size, plant type, and pest resistance. Growers should select southern pea cultivars based on buyer demand, yield, and resistance to pests. Always buy quality seed with high germination rates no matter what cultivar you decide to grow.

Southern peas should be planted in rows 20 to 36 inches apart, depending on the growth habit of the cultivar

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and your planting equipment. Seed should be spaced about 3 inches apart in the row. Plant the seed 1 to 1½ inches deep in moist soil. Depending on seed size, you will need 15 to 30 lbs of seed to plant an acre at 36-inch row spacing.

Cultural Program

Southern peas are very sensitive to nematodes. Use a nematode assay to determine the presence of threatening levels of nematodes. Recommended nematicides, rotation, or cultivars resistant to specific nematodes should be used to reduce the potential damage from nematodes. Although many insects attack southern peas, the worse ones include aphids, various caterpillars, and pea weevils (cowpea curculio). Like many crops in the legume family, southern peas can tolerate some injury to the leaves without reducing yields. However, insects that attack the pods reduce pea quality. You need to learn to identify insects and to apply a recommended insecticide only when insect populations reach potentially damaging levels.

Most diseases that attack southern peas can be prevented by choosing resistant cultivars, rotating crops, selecting fields free of major diseases, and treating the seed with fungicides. The most serious diseases are damping-off, Rhizoctonia root-rot, Fusarium wilt, Ashy stem blight, Southern blight,