

# Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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## Give [Your] Peas a Chance

Hey it's not joke for all you frustrated gardeners, but it really is still too cold to plant peas. The optimum germination temperature for peas is actually 24°C (75°F). While peas will eventually germinate at temperatures as low as 4.4°C, that is the minimum. Though we have had a few sunny days when the soil surface has begun to feel warm, just below the surface the soil it is still very cold. Today the soil thermometer in my garden shows 0 °C a couple of inches down.

SO, what to do? As with other plants, ideal germination temperatures are higher than ideal growth temperatures. When the spring is so cold I have had excellent results starting early peas indoors in vermiculite and planting them out later as seedlings. The seeds all germinate and they can grow for 2-3 weeks (to a couple of inches in height) simply on the energy stored in the seed. Some gardeners sow the peas in a section of aluminium gutter or other long narrow container, then slide the seedlings into furrows in the garden. I don't have the space to do this, but have found that I can cram over 30 pea seeds (enough to plant a 10 foot row) into a planter made from a 1-quart milk carton. Lay the carton on it's side, cut out the top side and poke drainage holes in the bottom side. Fill the carton half way with vermiculite, then lay down a layer of pea seeds. Fill the carton the rest of the way with vermiculite and water it well. When the peas come up, move the carton to a window sill with good light. Pea roots are strong enough to be disentangled without breaking in the loose vermiculite when it is time to plant them out in a couple of weeks. [This technique works really well for beans too.]

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Check out my web site: [www.lindagilkeson.ca](http://www.lindagilkeson.ca)

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