



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Is it possible to overdose on peas?

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I can't really say I've had a bumper crop of sugar snap peas this year, but what I have harvested has been might tasty. Everyone who has sampled them comments on their superb flavor. I noticed that the pod is thicker than ordinary pea pods. Maybe that's what gives them their snappy crispness. Every time I am in the garden (a few times a day) I eat a handful of peas, pod and all (the pods are more nutritious than the peas.) There is plenty for my needs--at least enough to make me wonder if a person can eat too many of them. (I think you get tired of eating them before that happens.) Peas were Thomas Jefferson's favorite vegetable, though I doubt he himself planted any. Being one of the earliest spring vegetables, those sweet peas must have been very welcome after a winter that was most likely free of fresh vegetables. Jefferson competed with his neighbors to see who would have the first pea harvest of the season; I know he won at least some of the time. Those who have read about Jefferson's non-political life know that he had a very extensive garden, not



to mention his farms. He was among the first Americans to grow and eat tomatoes---at that time most people believed they were poisonous.

I planted my peas back on April 12th. I put in a double row on either side of a 6' high wire fence, about thirty feet long. I planted the peas about an inch apart. It took them a while to sprout because of the cool temperatures. I don't think they all came up---probably some varmints got some of them before they sprouted. I usually overplant, anyway; I'd rather thin out the plants than have a skimpy garden.

Like many other vegetables, it's important to harvest the peas when they are ready. You must do

this, even if you can't use them all at once. Picking the ripe fruit signals to the plant to produce more flowers, and therefore more fruit. If you don't harvest the peas, production will diminish. Plus, flavor is best when the fruit is picked at the right time. In the case of

peas, if you leave them on the vine too long they become less sweet, sort of starchy and bland. The pod is normally rather smooth and you can't really tell how many peas are inside. But, on older, overripe pods, the peas are evident (the pod is mottled and bulging), and they are then past their



overripe (top), perfect (bottom)

peak flavor, at least in my opinion. It's tempting to want the pea pods to get fatter and fatter, but there is a point at which the flavor turns. You'll figure it out, just like I did.

My cucumber plants are doing very well; they're downright lush. I've picked about a dozen cukes so far, but it's early. I planted ten pots of cukes with two or three plants in each pot. I prefer the smaller burpless cukes, the ones that have very thin skin so you don't need to peel them.



male cucumber flower

But I was disappointed to discover that so many of the early flowers are male rather than female. That wasn't supposed to happen. Both varieties ('Sugar Crunch' and 'Beit Alpha') are advertised as being parthenocarpic. That means they have mostly female flowers and don't require male flowers for pollination. (Greenhouse growers prefer this type because there are very few pollinating insect in

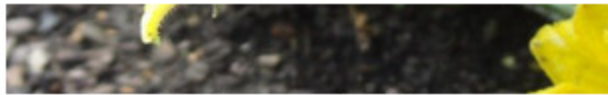
greenhouses.) Seed of parthenocarpic varieties is expensive, and I expect to get what I am paying for. I called Burpee Seed Company ('Sugar Crunch Hybrid') to see what they had to say. They didn't have an answer at first; they advised me to "wait." Then I suggested maybe the cooler temperatures were a factor. They decided that was probably the case. But still, I wonder.

Here's how to tell male and female cucumber flowers apart. You could examine the flowers themselves, but it's easier to look behind the flowers. If there is a threadlike stem, it is male; if there is a noticeable swelling (in this case, a one inch long cucumber, technically an ovary) it is female. Only the female will produce fruit, and then only if fertilized (some are self-fertile.)



In a [previous blog](#) I mentioned how it is important to pick cucumbers at the correct

size, to get the best flavor--
-pretty much the same
principal as with the peas.



female cucumber flower

Last night I was tending to

my cukes at home when I came upon a hidden cuke. If you have a number of cucumber plants, you always miss a few. The ideal size for this variety is 4" long; this one was now 8" long. I took it inside to my salad prep area, to sample its flavor. It was inedible---very bitter. So, when picking your vegetables, make sure you pick them at the correct size. Now, get out there and mind your peas and cukes.