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GARDEN NOTES

BEANS - EARLY JULY NOT TOO LATE TO PLANT THEM

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Summer-04

Although tomatoes are the most popular vegetable in the home garden. Did you ever hear a fable about Tom and the tomato stalk? Probably not. Still, the fabled bean is the second most commonly planted vegetable according to Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. Many types of beans can be grown in northern Utah. The most popular variety is snap beans, sometimes referred to as string beans. The name comes from the old-fashioned beans that were indeed stringy. Most newer varieties are not tough and stringy but rather string-less, sweet and tender.

Snap beans come in many colors, Goodspeed says. The most common color is green, but there are yellow, purple and even red-speckled. The seeds inside the pod can also be multi-colored. Snap beans are available in either pole or bush types. Bush types are easy to grow because they do not require trellising. Both types have advantages and disadvantages.

“Bush beans need more room per plant because they grow in a wide clump and not up a support,” Goodspeed explains. “They generally produce most of their beans over a two-week period. Then, there is a decline in production and the plant weakens and sometimes dies. Plants should be given about six to eight inches of their own space for growth. If planted closer they still produce, but the overall harvest is not increased.”

Pole beans, as the name implies, need some sort of support to climb, Goodspeed says. They can reach heights of more than 10 feet, if left to grow. They produce beans over a longer period of time than bush types and most growers feel they produce a sweeter, more tender bean. With proper care they can begin production by mid-summer and continue producing until the weather cools in the fall.

“I plant three rows of pole beans under each of my trellises,” he says. “One row is located directly underneath and two spaced one foot away on both sides. Each plant is spaced four to six inches apart.

“I use one-inch PVC pipe for my trellises. I place two, six-foot uprights, spaced about four feet apart, on each end. An elbow joint is placed on top of the uprights with a four-foot piece connecting into the elbows. A two-foot piece of re-bar is hammered into the ground so the

upright pieces simply slip over them to remain standing throughout the summer. In the winter, the whole assembly can be broken down and stored in a small area.”

Strings can be tied from the top of the structure to the ground so the beans can climb up, he adds. Fencing wire can also be secured between the top and bottom of the structure in place of the string. Both are easily removed in the fall.

It’s not too late to plant beans, Goodspeed says. Beans planted in early July generally start producing in mid August and continue until frost. Planting late helps beans avoid the Mexican bean beetle, which generally only attacks early beans.

“Besides Mexican bean beetles, there are few pests that create problems,” he says. “Beans prefer a good organic-rich soil and being watered deeply and infrequently. Over watering can increase powdery mildew and root-rot problems. Let the ground dry between watering. They normally only need to be fertilized when first planted.”

Be sure to harvest beans on a regular basis and as soon as they ripen, he cautions. Beans left on the vine to dry will decrease production. Pick them when they are swollen and still soft and firm. They should snap when broken in two.

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