

How to Grow French Beans (Phaseolus Vulgaris)

Introduction:

Green beans are young, unripe fruits of various cultivars of the common bean *Phaseolus Vulgaris*. They are known by many names including French bean (or the French haricot vert), string beans although today most varieties are stringless, snap beans or dwarf beans.

They are distinguished from many other varieties of beans in that green beans are harvested and consumed with their enclosing pods before the bean seeds inside are fully mature.

French beans come in a variety of colours - the usual green bean but also cream, yellow and the purple podded varieties. There are **dwarf** and climbing varieties of the french bean. Climbing French beans are grown in the same way as Runner beans as discussed in the article "How to Grow Runner Beans" on the allotment articles website.

Dwarf beans grow quickly but they only crop for a short time, therefore it is best to make repeat sowings for a summer long supply. Fast growing and taking up little space in the ground these dwarf beans are ideal to be grown directly into the ground, or into containers or even in a hanging basket.

Preparing the ground for sowing and planting.

Dig the site in the autumn and add compost or well rotted manure. The site should not have been used for beans last year. Choose a warm, sunny spot and if sowing direct into the ground first warm the soil by covering the soil with a cloche, leaving it in place to protect the newly sown seeds.

Prepare the seed bed about 2 weeks before sowing by removing weeds and adding a general purpose fertiliser such as Growmore at this time.

Dwarf beans like to be planted near potatoes and beetroot. Like all beans they do not like to be planted near garlic, onions, fennel, kohlrabi, gladioli or sunflowers.

Sowing seeds indoors.

Sow indoors in late April- early May. Use small pots or modules sowing one bean in each - 5cm (2inches) deep. Place in a propagator or on a sunny window sill to germinate. Germination takes between 7 and 14 days. Water regularly.

In late May - early June harden off the plants ready for planting outside into their final site. Plant out 10cm (4inches) apart with 45cm (18inches) spacing between rows. Support the plants with short twigs or pea sticks to prevent them toppling over, or sow in blocks to allow them to support each other.

Sowing seeds outdoors

First warm the ground (as above) and sow seeds 5cm (2inches) deep at 10cm (4inches) spacing in rows 45cm (18inches) apart. They are best sown in blocks to support each other. Seeds can be sown in early to mid April but do not remove the cloches until late May when the danger of late frosts has passed.

Successional sowing until June-July means plants will continue cropping into October and the first frosts.

Sowing in Containers.

Both dwarf and climbing beans can be grown in large containers and look good on patios and in small gardens.

Choose a warm, sheltered position. Containers should be 30-45cm (12-18inches) wide for dwarf beans and for climbing beans 75cm (30inches) wide. Sow seeds directly into the container spacing them 15cm (6inches) apart.

Insert a wigwam of 1.8m (6 foot) canes to support climbing beans and choose a heavy container to prevent pot falling over. Dwarf beans do not require support and look great cascading over the side of a pot or even in a hanging basket.

Harvesting your crop.

The approximate time from sowing to harvesting is 8-12 weeks, which means the first crops are ready in July. Pick the pods when they are 10cm (4inches) long. They are ready when the pods snap easily and before the beans can be seen through the pod. Take care not to pull too hard or you will loosen the plant. Pick regularly and dwarf beans will crop for several weeks.

Protect seedlings from slugs and hoe regularly to keep weeds down.. Mulch around the stems in June. Once the pods have all been harvested feed the plants with liquid fertiliser. In this way a second, smaller crop can be obtained.

Pests and Remedies.

Slugs: Feed on the young seedlings and leave a tell tail slime trail on the soil around the crop and on the leaves.

Remedy: Beer traps, sawdust or eggshell barriers, copper tape, biocontrols.

Black Bean Aphid: disfigure plants and cause stunting of leaves and stems.

Remedy: Catch infestations when small and squash. Wash off with soapy water.

Birds: Pigeons especially cause a number of problems by eating the seedlings.

Remedy: Protect with netting or fleece.

Growing for our Annual Show:

There is one class in our show: Class17 calls for five French beans. There is no distinction between climbing and dwarf French beans. French beans attract 15pts as follows: condition 5pts, Uniformity 3pts, size 2pts, Bean not showing 3pts, colour 2pts.

Straight, fresh, tender snap pods with stalks and of an even length- a good green colour with no outward sign of seeds. Size is of lesser importance than tenderness - discard old, tough, fibrous specimens. Stage in straight lines for easy counting and uniformity with stalks at the top, tails to the front.

Refs: www.rhs.org.uk/vegetables/dwarfbeans/grow-your-own

www.allotment-garden.org/vegetables/dwarfbeans-growing