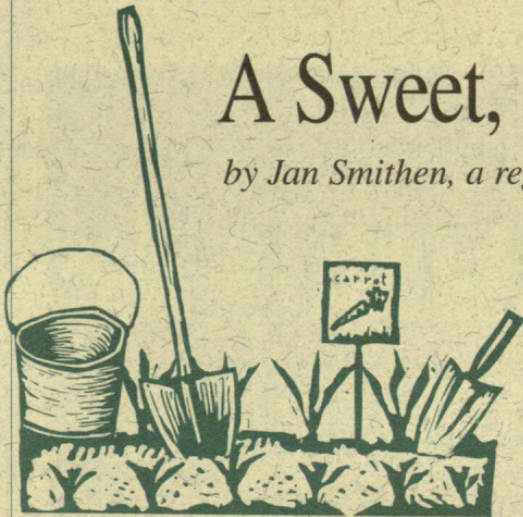


A Sweet, Sweetpea Idea

by Jan Smithen, a regular contributor to the Arboretum News



It's not too late to sow sweetpeas, and here's a good idea for those with small gardens or not much room left in the sun. All you need is 8 to 16 seeds and a sunny space no bigger than a tomato plant would occupy. Buy a bag of steer manure and 4 or 5 bamboo poles, 8 feet long. If you're lucky enough to know someone who grows Golden Bamboo (*Bambusa multiplex* 'Golden Goddess') with its little branches at each node, see if you can have a few 8 foot culms. Trim each of the little branches to 4 or 6 inches.

Soak your sweetpea seeds overnight in a cup of hot water. Next day, plant 4 seeds each in a 4 inch plastic pot. Use a good potting mix and poke the seeds down 1/2 inch, no more. Firm in gently with your fingertips and gently soak with water until it comes out the bottom. Place the pots outside where they get good light, but no hot sun. Keep them watered every day or two until they germinate: 10 days to two weeks.

This gives you time to prepare the area where they are to go. Select a sunny spot 3 or 4 foot square and lay over your whole bag of manure. Dig it in with a garden fork as deep as you can. Sweetpeas love manure, but like to grow into it, not be planted in it.

Make a circle around the outside of your prepared spot and push your bamboo

poles into the ground evenly spaced around its circumference. They need to go in 12 to 14 inches deep. Stamp them down well. Draw the tops of the poles together like a teepee and tie them with garden twine.

When your sweetpeas have germinated and grown to about 4 inches, it is time to plant them. Dig two to four holes around the inside perimeter of your teepee, depending on how many pots you've seeded. Carefully knock the seedlings out of the pot and plant at the same level. You need not separate them;

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plant the whole potful together. Water well. Soon, they will start to wind and reach for their supports. Some gardeners like to wind twine around the base of their teepee, just to give the young plants a little guidance.

You must keep sweetpeas picked as they bloom. If they are allowed to make seed pods, they will stop blooming. They also will continue to perform if you use a liquid fertilizer on them one month after setting out and once a month after that until warm weather. No matter what you do, sweetpeas stop blooming as soon as hot weather arrives,

so you might as well pull them out and take down your teepee until next year.

A new source of outstanding sweetpea seeds is right here in California. These are the large flowering, long stemmed English varieties that you love to bury your nose in, they smell so good. You can even select your sweetpeas in one or more individual colors if you wish.

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