How to Plant, Grow, and Harvest Beans

When to Grow
Beans are warm weather crops and can be planted from late spring through fall in Georgia. The optimal soil temperature for planting beans is 75-95 degrees Fahrenheit. They cannot withstand freezing temperatures, so keep that in mind if planting in spring and late fall!

Where to Grow
In general, it is a good idea to add some compost before planting. It is best to avoid high nitrogen fertilizers (synthetic or organic) when planting beans, as this inhibits their ability to pull nitrogen from the air and fix it into the soil.

Planting
Plant seeds about 1 inch deep and about 3 inches apart. If planting in rows, plant the rows 18 to 36 inches apart.

To harvest beans in October, plant them as early as the first week of August and no later than the first week of September.

Plant Care
Beans are fairly low-maintenance crops. To make harvesting easier and to ensure plants are receiving adequate sunlight, keep the area around the plants well-weeded.

How to Harvest
To harvest beans, use two hands. Because the plants can break or rip out of the ground easily, use the fingers of one hand to hold onto the stem and use your other hand to pull the bean pod off. Harvest regularly to encourage the plants to keep growing new pods.

To harvest dry beans, leave the pods on the plant to let the seeds inside mature and dry. The plants will start to dry up and turn brittle, the leaves will mostly be gone, and all that should remain are dry, brittle pods. Seeds can mold inside the pods if picked wet so plan to harvest the pods when there hasn’t been much rainfall. After harvesting the pods, let them continue to dry out somewhere covered for a couple weeks before shelling them.

Science Extension
Most legume varieties germinate better and are healthier when the seed is inoculated with rhizobium bacteria before planting. The rhizobia colonize the roots of legumes, pull nitrogen from the air, and concentrate it in nodules on the roots. In return, they receive carbohydrates from their host plant. The root nodules are eventually cast off into the soil, adding nitrogen to the soil in a form more accessible to other plants. That’s why legumes are called nitrogen fixers!

Rhizobium bacteria actually exist naturally in most soils, but it’s a good idea to inoculate legume seeds if you’re growing in poor soil or on a new garden site. Legume inoculant typically comes in the form of a powder, but it is alive! To inoculate, simply get your seeds wet, roll them around in the powder to coat them, and then plant them right away. Do not inoculate your seeds until you are ready to plant them.

These instructions are applicable to most green and dry bean seed, but it is always a good idea to check the back of your seed packet for planting instructions specific to the variety you are planting. For more information, and to access a video field trip on planting legumes, visit georgiaorganics.org/for-schools/makeroomforlegumes

For more information, visit www.georgiaorganics.org/for-schools/octoberfarmtoschoolmonth.