

# Austrian Winter Peas

## Austrian Winter Peas

The Austrian winter pea (*Pisum sativum* subsp. *arvense*), sometimes called a "black pea" or "field pea", is a fall-seeded pea that was introduced from Austria to the Pacific-northwest in the 1930s. It is originally native to Europe, northern Africa, and western Asia. The Austrian winter pea seeds themselves are fairly small, only about 120 to 140 mg, and have a speckled or marbled appearance on an olive green casing. Austrian winter pea is a low-growing, long-vined legume. It has hollow, slender and succulent stems, 2 to 4 feet long. The foliage is pale green, and the flowers are colored, usually purple, pink or reddish. The leaf consists of one to three pairs of leaflets and terminal branched tendrils. Pods are 1.5 to 2.5 inches long with three to five round, dark-colored seeds. Seed color is commonly gray with purple or brown mottles. Seed size is fairly large with test weights of 55 to 60 pounds per bushel.

## Adaptation

As the name implies, Austrian winter pea has good winter-hardiness and can be successfully grown fall-seeded in the intermountain region valleys, as well as in the Palouse regions of Washington, Idaho and Oregon. However, during severe winters, when the small pea plants are exposed to long periods of sub-zero weather without snow cover, they may be winterkilled. Austrian winter pea can also be grown spring-seeded as a summer annual. Spring-planted Austrian winter peas should be seeded as early as possible in the spring at approximately the same time as spring wheat and barley. Delayed seeding often reduces both the quality and yield of peas.

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## Planting

In colder climates, producers of the Austrian winter pea use rough tillage prior to establishing the crop. The residues from previous crops and the rough tillage trap snow that will act as much needed insulation during the colder months.

## Uses

Austrian winter peas are well suited to creating a high quality food plot on their own or as part of a mixture to attract deer. Whitetail deer specifically favor the Austrian winter pea highly. Deer will be attracted to a plot containing the pea shortly after the plant germinates. Also, because the Austrian winter pea produces a heavy vine growth that will decay rapidly when plowed under, it is a valuable tool in preparing soil to have new crops planted.