

## Growing Peanuts in the Home Garden

*(Arachis hypogaea. L)*

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### INTRODUCTION

Peanuts are tasty, nutritious legumes that are easy to grow at home. The peanut has a unique way of producing seed (nuts). Peanuts flower above ground and then send down a shoot (called a peg) towards the ground. The peg enters the ground and once it has penetrated about 2 cm under the surface it begins to form a nut with a surrounding shell. The nut remains in the ground until harvest time.

The peanut is not a true nut, as it does not grow on a tree and it belongs to the family of legumes, which means it can “fix” nitrogen (N) in the soil. It does this through a working relationship with rhizobium bacteria, which are inoculated into the soil at planting time. Due to the N peanuts fix, they are very useful in rotation with other crops that use N, such as vegetables and sweet corn.

Growing peanuts is easy. They do have some specific needs, which must be met to ensure that you have productive peanut bushes.



**Figure 1.** An inverted peanut bush. At this stage the pods are maturing and nearly ready for harvest.

### SEED

Seed can be obtained from DBIRD or the Peanut Company of Australia. Contact details are at the end of this Agnote. Be sure to ask for rhizobium culture which is available with the seed. You will need this at planting time. Keep the culture cool as directed on the label.

**Safety tip:** Seed is treated with a fungicide to help prevent seedling diseases. Use gloves when handling seed or inoculant and wash your hands immediately after use. Do not eat treated seed, or leave it in a place where someone might mistake it for edible seed.



## FERTILISER

To be productive peanuts require fertiliser. A blended fertiliser that contains phosphorous (P), potassium (K), and sulphur (S) is recommended. Trace elements such as copper (Cu), zinc (Zn), magnesium (Mg), boron (B) and molybdenum (Mo) will be required as well. Horticultural fertilisers often have blends that will combine all of these nutrients. Ask your nursery if you are not sure. Avoid fertilisers that contain high levels of N, as legumes do not require N. If the fertiliser contains a small amount of N (3 to 4 %) it is still suitable. Fertiliser should be mixed in the ground with a garden fork a few weeks prior to planting. As a guide 30 g of fertiliser per square metre will be plenty. Ensure it is well mixed in to about 20 cm deep and not concentrated in one spot.

Gypsum will also be needed and should be applied at the rate of three to four cups on the top of the ground and close to the plant. It does not need to be mixed into the soil. Gypsum should be applied within the first three weeks after the seedlings have emerged.

## PLANTING

Peanut seeds are very fragile and must be handled like eggs. Prior to planting inoculate the seed with rhizobium culture. Put the seed and the culture into a bag and carefully roll it around carefully mixing the peat culture in with the seed. **Follow label directions.** Plant seeds about 5 cm deep and about 20 cm apart. Approximately 40 pods will grow per bush, so adjust planting rate according to how many nuts you wish to grow. Allow for some seedling losses, on average about 15 to 20% will die during emergence.

## WATER

Peanuts need to be watered regularly right up to the day they are ready for harvest.

## INSECTS

Peanuts are relatively tolerant to insect damage. Look for grubs feeding on the flowers and pegs. If grubs are present they can damage the crop. Ask your local nursery for a suitable control. Take some of the grubs in with you to ensure the correct control is used. Read the label and adhere to all safety instructions. Check for grubs twice a week whilst plants are flowering. Once flowering has slowed down the risk of damage from insects is low.

## DISEASE

Peanuts can contract several diseases. In a home garden control is probably not necessary. Leaf spot may occur during the plant's life. Chemical control is possible, but the chemicals are not available in small amounts. The disease will cause some leaves to drop off. Nuts will still form and so control is probably not necessary. In severe cases contact a DBIRD agronomist. To avoid disease use lots of grass mulch in the garden prior to planting. Do not grow peanuts in the same area in consecutive years.

## WEEDS

Hand weeding is the best way to control weeds in the home garden. Mulch is an effective weed controller and can be placed around and between the plants. Do not place mulch within 10 cm of the base of the plant so as to allow room for the pegs to enter the ground.

## HARVEST

So everything has gone well and you need to know when to harvest! If the plants have been grown in the wet season, they will be ready 120 days after planting. If they are grown in the dry season it will take a little longer, usually about 170 days.

Carefully lift up the edge of the bush and look at the pods, open up a few; try the pods closest to the middle of the bush. These will be ready first. If the inside of the shell is dark in colour and the kernel is changing from a pink to a gold speckled colour then the crop is ready. Because of the long flowering time of peanuts, not all pods will be ready at once. This is normal and some pods will never come to maturity and the over-mature pods may begin to fall off. The trick is to judge when most of the pods are ready. If a lot of the pods are dark in colour inside the shell, then that is a good guide to maturity.

Once you have decided your peanuts are ready then dig up the whole bush with a garden fork, shake off the dirt and hang up to dry for a couple of days. Once the bush has dried enough to become brittle, pick off the pods. If some dirt is still stuck to them, wash them.

The peanuts are now ready for eating raw, cooked, roasted or as part of a confectionary. The only limit is your imagination!

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## **WARNING**

Legal restrictions in the NT prohibit the feeding of any foliage (leaves, stems) from the peanut crop including the use of grazing, hay and residues to feed livestock if chlorothalonil has been applied as a fungicide against leaf diseases at any point during the growing season (read the label on the fungicide).

Please visit us at our website:

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