



Urban Harvest

It's Not Easy to Pick a Favorite Vegetable

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Gardening is a complicated affair and generally my problem is choosing among the many possible topics. But some of you help me choose. Many of you write me at BobInTheGarden@urbanharvest.org with comments and questions about these articles, and sometimes I convert them into subsequent articles.

One question that comes up a lot is "What are your five favorite vegetables?" That's a difficult question. How does one choose among so many good things especially when too much of anything gets boring? I usually answer with one or two favorites. That usually satisfies the questioner, but it doesn't really satisfy me.

What I want to say is there are perhaps 15,000 varieties of vegetables you can grow in Southeast Texas. So it's not easy to choose two. In fact, I can't pick 20 favorites. But I can attempt to name 20 good ones. So, every three months for the next year, I will talk about five



Pole beans grow on a trellis

favorite vegetables I will be planting soon. This spring, my five planted favorites include tomatoes, peppers, pole beans, sweet corn and winter squash.

Pepper transplants should go in the garden as soon as it stops being cold. Right now, mine are under fluorescent lights indoors. I like to grow 10-20 sweets in one part of the garden and another 10 chilies somewhere on the other side of the yard. I plant them about 18-24 inches apart for three rows in a 5-foot wide, well-fertilized, raised bed.

My favorite varieties are ram's horn- or bull's horn-types because they are not quite as heavy as bell peppers and don't hold rain water on their tops near the stem. This is important because like tomatoes, peppers taste best when fully ripe, so they must stay on the plant until they start to

change to their ripening color. After that they can be picked and ripened well inside. My favorite this year is Tolli's Sweet Italian.

Unlike tomatoes, pepper plants will produce not only in the spring, but also lightly in the summer and then heavily in late fall. So they need good irrigation, good mulch and a quality organic fertilizer every three months. Peppers will benefit from support, such as three-ring tomato cages. Without these, branches laden with fruit often break off.

Although peppers mainly self-pollinate, there is a danger of jalapeño or Anaheim chilies contaminating the sweet ones if they are cross-pollinated by bees. Separation of chilies and sweets is recommended.

Another favorite for March is pole green beans. Snap beans grow in bush form and on poles or trellises. At our house, we prefer pole beans. They are better flavored and more productive, and their season is longer. There are dozens of these Kentucky-Wonder types, so gardeners have their favorites. Ours is Fortex. Fortex is an early, dependable, delicious pole bean with an extended harvest period. It is completely stringless even when the bean is 12 inches. We plant the seeds in March and



A 7-foot green mesh trellis shows winter snow peas in March. By planting Fortex pole beans at the base of the trellis, production will continue until July.

April on a metal-wire trellis in a raised bed. To make the trellis, get U-posts at your hardware or fencing supply store.

Also get lightweight fencing with 1- or 2-inch mesh. The green vinyl-coated fencing is attractive, sturdy enough and long lasting. Drive U-posts into the garden bed every 6 feet, and then bolt a second post to each driven post so as to make a trellis 7 feet high. Then plant the beans every 3 inches below the trellis and about 6 inches from each side of the trellis.

(www.johnnyseeds.com or www.burpee.com).

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