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Starting Lettuce and Peas

As spring gets closer, you might be thinking about starting cool season crops like peas and lettuce. These vegetables can be susceptible to freezing, but if planted to late the heat will reduce harvest. Here are some guidelines for getting your lettuce and peas to start growing.

Lettuce is susceptible to freeze damage, but is fairly cold tolerant, making it a great option for growing in a season extender such as a low tunnel or hoop house. There are many types of lettuce. Leafy varieties mature quickly and typically tolerate the heat better. Romaine has upright leaves with a strong mid-rib. Butterhead has a rounded shape and requires more time to mature. Head lettuce takes almost twice the amount of time to reach maturity compared to leafy lettuce. It is a better option for fall gardening.

Lettuce can be direct seeded or transplanted in mid-March through early April. That means, if you plan to grow transplants, now is a good time to get seeds started. Lettuce will germinate best with light and warmth. Soil that is too cold will slow germination. On the contrary, soil over 85 degrees F will prevent germination altogether. When seedlings have four to six true leaves they can be transplanted into the garden.

Peas can be direct seeded into the garden in early to mid-March as long as the soil is dry enough to work. Peas do not like having their roots disturbed, so they do not normally do well when started inside and transplanted later. If planting is delayed peas may not reach maturity before the heat arrives and stops production. Consider early maturing varieties with resistance to powdery mildew. Some varieties have vines that will grow up to five feet tall and require trellising. Dwarf varieties do not require staking.

If you are looking for more information on growing vegetables and fruits, you can find the Kansas Garden Guide available online from the K-State Bookstore. You can also contact your local extension office to purchase a hard copy.