

THE SIMPLE THINGS

PLANT LIBRARY



ILLUSTRATION: SARA MULVANNY. WORDS: CLARE GOGERTY

SWEET PEAS

This is the month sweet peas (*Lathyrus odoratus*) come into their own. If you planted a few seedlings in spring, they should be climbing merrily up canes and netting now, unfurling their pretty butterfly-winged flowers, filling the air with dreamy fragrance. They're brilliant cut flowers, too – there's little better than wandering into the garden and snipping a few blooms to take indoors. And the more you pick, the more the plant will flower.

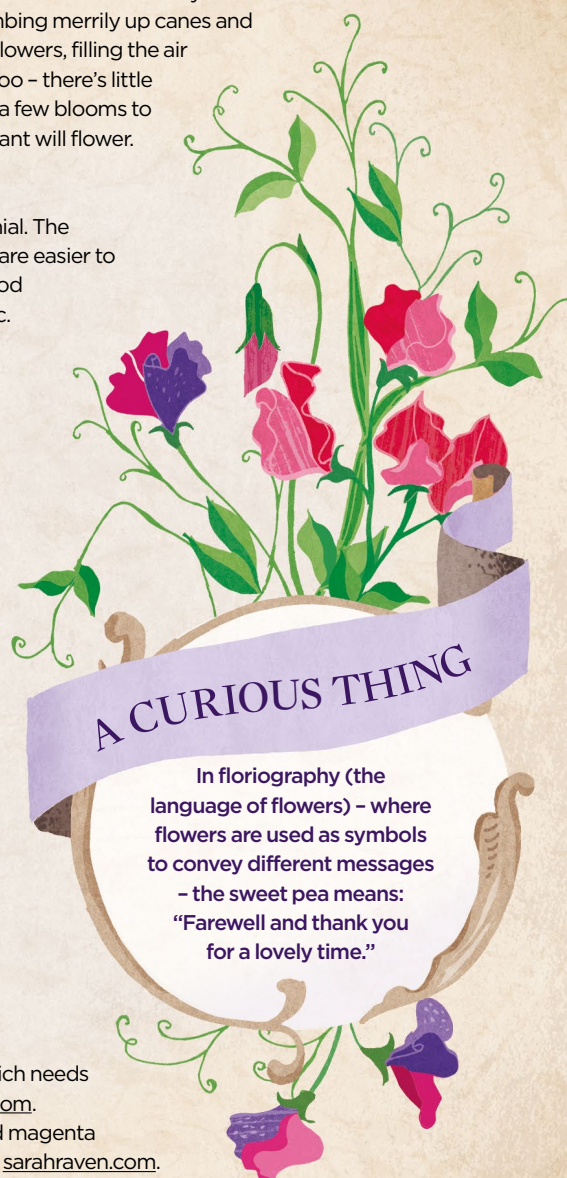
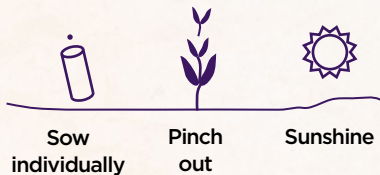
Need to know

There are two types of sweet pea: annual and perennial. The perennial, or everlasting, varieties aren't scented but are easier to grow, and produce blooms all summer. They look good clambering through shrubs such as forsythia and lilac.

How to grow

Wait until either October or November this year, or late January next to sow. Plant single seeds in root trainers filled with seed compost. When they are 7.5cm-10cm tall, pinch out top to encourage side shoots.

Plant out in April, in a sunny spot, 20–30 cm apart. Support with canes or netting. Water and tie in new shoots as they appear. Pick frequently to keep the flowers coming.



In floriography (the language of flowers) – where flowers are used as symbols to convey different messages – the sweet pea means: “Farewell and thank you for a lovely time.”

- ***Lathyrus odoratus* ‘Snoopea’**: dwarf sweet pea, which needs no support. £2.99 for 30 seeds; thompson-morgan.com.
- ***Lathyrus odoratus* ‘Matucana’**: bi-colour purple and magenta flowers. £1.95 for 20 seeds, or £16.95 for 12 seedlings; sarahraven.com.
- ***Lathyrus odoratus* ‘Unwins Lipstick’**: pretty pink flowers with a crinkly edge, long stems and a fine fragrance. £1.30 for 12 seeds; englishsweetpeas.co.uk.