

## Pole Beans by Cliff Winter

*Phaseolus vulgaris*

Variety: Stringless Blue Lake S-7 (Heirloom)

Family: legume

Another vegetable my family grew was a bean of many names: green beans, snap beans, or bush beans. We had many long rows of them. I remember bending over, squatting or kneeling, for long periods of time, picking them in the warm sun. My mother would follow up with all the beans I missed. We would then retreat to the shaded porch and prepare the beans for canning, ending the season with thirty plus quarts of various beans, green and yellow.

Now, I no longer live on an acre plus parcel, my garden patch is quite small. In fact, I have raised beds, three by three feet. Not much space for bush beans. So instead of growing my beans long and wide, I went up, by switching to pole beans. Another plus, it's easier on my back.

The Blue Lake Stringless pole bean gets its name from the lake district of Ukiah, California. The original Blue Lake bean came from the upper Missouri River basin, where it was found growing wild in the gardens of Native Americans. The Blue Lake was a favorite of early Oregon farmers. It produces a heavy crop of tender, crisp, and stringless pods that remain tender even at full maturity. It is ideal for table use, canning, and freezing.

Planting, growing, and harvesting tips:

- Plant the seeds after the last frost since the plants are sensitive to cold.
- Place seeds 2" deep and 10" apart, allowing them to grow on a trellis or other vertical support as soon as they emerge from the soil. If using a teepee structure, plant them in groups of 5-6 seeds per pole.
- Germination usually occurs in 14-20 days.
- A good companion plant is corn, it provides a natural support for both the vine and the corn stalks.
- Keep soil moist to ensure healthy plants and a productive crop, taking care not to disturb the blossoms as they form.
- Mulch helps conserve moisture, control weeds, and regulate soil temperature.
- Excess nitrogen will delay flowering, sidedress only after heavy blooms and setting of pods using 3 tablespoons of 10-10-10 per 10 ft row.
- Harvesting begins in about ten weeks, pick daily to improve production.
- For best flavor and tenderness, pick the bean when they are no larger than a pencil in thickness.
- Serve or preserve the same day of harvest for freshest taste.
- To save seeds for future planting, allow the bean to dry completely on vine, pods will be light brown, and seeds will rattle inside. Remove seeds from pods.
- After seeds are completely dry, store them in a cool, dry place for up to a year.

I prepare my green beans steamed till tender, then tossed with a tablespoon of butter and salt and pepper to taste. Enjoy!

Photo by Cliff Winter

References:

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