Peanuts (Arachis hypogaea)

The growing zones for peanuts
Usually grown in the warmer regions, peanuts can mature as far north as New England in a soil that is rich in humus. Although they are semitropical, the light frosts of early spring or late fall do them little harm. They do require a long growing season, and have become one of the chief crops in the South. Through special growing methods they can be grown with reasonable success in the North as well, even in the severe New England climate.

The planting and culture of peanuts
Work the soil deeply, and thoroughly turn in compost, aged manure or leaf mold if necessary. Peanuts can be planted, shell and all, or may be hulled first. Although hulling reportedly hastens growth, if the red skin of the nut is torn, the seed will not germinate. Choose large seeds for rapid growth and high yield.

Planting peanuts
In the South, the kernels are planted at least four inches deep, but, in the North, plant no deeper than 1 1/2 inches. Shallow planting will encourage quicker growth, and prevent damp rot in case of a cold, wet spring. Plant four kernels to a mound, with mounds 18 inches apart in rows two feet apart. In the central part of Massachusetts, peanuts may be planted during the third week of April. Subtract a week if you live 100 miles further south, or add a week if you live 100 miles further north.

If the days are cool and cloudy, the peanuts will take some time to germinate and send up tender shoots. Do not be discouraged if plants fail to appear in seven days.

Cultivating peanuts
When the plants are six inches tall, begin cultivating the rows. This will aerate the soil and keep down weeds. After plants have attained 12 inches, hill the rows as you would potatoes, hilling the soil high around each plant. This is very important, for, as the branches grow, their lower leaves drop off. In place of the discarded leaf, a long, pointed peduncle appears. As it grows it will force its way into the mounded soil, and there form a peanut pod at its very tip.

After the plants have been properly hilled, mulch between the plants with at least eight inches of straw or grass clippings. The decaying material will not only keep down weeds, but, each time it rains, juices will be carried down to the hungry roots. Thin the plants to about ten inches apart. Your peanut plants, thus treated, will require no more attention until harvesttime.

Harvesting peanuts
Peanuts are ready to be harvested when the leaves begin to turn yellow, the kernels develop and the veins in the pods darken. This may coincide with the arrival of the first frost in your area.
Lift the peanut bush gently out of the ground and shake it free of dirt. Check the planting site for any peanuts that may have broken off from the bush. Pick the peanuts from the bush and store them in shallow trays in a warm, dry place. It will take at least two months of drying before the nuts are ready to be roasted. Save the largest and best formed of your crop for next year's planting.

**Varieties of peanuts**
Jumbo Virginia and EarlySpanish are hardy in the North as well as in the corn belt. Jumbo Runner yields large, sweet nuts. Spanish peanuts are heavy-bearing, dwarf bushes.

**Peanut hulls as a valuable mulch**
Rich in nitrogen, peanut hulls and shells can be advantageously used in mulching and composting. Peanut shells contain 3.6 percent nitrogen, .7 percent phosphoric acid and .45 percent potash, while peanut shell ashes contain .8 percent nitrogen, .15 percent phosphoric acid and .5 percent potash.