

Fava Beans, Greens and Other Things

Fava Beans (*Vicia faba*) also known as horse beans, faba beans and broad beans are the one of the oldest agricultural crops dating back at least 5,000 years. Historically they were grown mostly for the fresh green and dried beans in Asia and Europe. In my garden, I grow them for the greens and the green beans and for their nitrogen contribution to the soil. In fact, it would be difficult to grow sustainably without them.

Not heard of fava greens – well you're not alone. I grew them for years and never ate the greens, but enjoyed them as raw green beans – mostly eaten in the garden, although a few made it to the salad bowl. But, why not eat the greens, which are delicious both raw and cooked. If you want to try them here, you will have to grow your own – they are simply not available otherwise.

If you are growing any of your own food, including fava beans in your inter-planting and rotational planting strategies will provide excellent nutritional food for you, your soil creatures and other companion plants – particularly during the cooler growing seasons. You can grow both Sweet Loraines and Guatemala Purples here through the winter season, without covers, by planting them in September and October. The seeds need 65-70 F soil temperatures to germinate well and moderate to cool daytime temperatures to bloom and set fruit well – ideal for late fall and early winter. Not to worry about an early frost – they are cold tolerant to 10F.

Green Manure

We have all heard about it, some plant it - mostly during winter as a cover crop – but few eat it. Just the term, Edible Green Manure, takes a while to adopt. But, if you can handle “Green Eggs and Ham”, why not “Edible Green Manure”? It does make your garden more vigorous, by making your soil richer, while producing food for the gardener. Incidentally, fava beans are not the only edible green manure – all of the legumes work that way, even though most are planted as food crops not manure crops. While most green manure is traditionally grown during winter and plowed under in early spring, there are other and better ways to accomplish soil fertility in the kitchen garden.

Fava Beans and Garlic

Fava beans and garlic are a delicious culinary combination as well as an excellent inter-planting strategy. In September or October, set out a bed of garlic cloves on an 8-inch grid and sow fava beans between them. The garlic will sprout and set down a strong root system during winter. Those fava beans will germinate and grow vigorously thorough winter – providing fava greens for the salad bowl or steamer. By picking back the fava bean plants, you are periodically reducing the root to shoot ratio, making the accumulated nutrients available to the soil colony and garlic plants. When the fava beans start to bloom profusely, (early April) cut the plants off just beneath the soil and use the tops for mulch in the remaining garlic bed – the soil colony will do the rest of the work for you. About this time, the garlic plants need root space and nutrition as the soil warms

and they begin growing delicious bulbs for your culinary pleasure. You might call this strategy – “having your green manure and eating it too”.

till next time,

Darrol Shillingburg
Doña Ana County Extension Master Gardener