

## Construct a Fun Beanstalk Fort

Building a beanstalk fort is a great way of creating a botanical backyard playhouse for your children while giving them a tangible sense of how the earth produces food. Assembling and maintaining a beanstalk fort will teach kids about caring for plants while giving them a nearby hideout place to play with friends.

### In constructing your beanstalk fort, follow these simple steps:

**Take a Site Survey and Gather Materials.** Pick out a location for your fort that has good soil drainage and receives a healthy helping of sunlight. About a week before planting, help the children measure out a circle approximately 4 feet in diameter and gather your beanpoles. Bamboo garden stakes and tree branches make excellent supports for a fort and should measure around 6-9 feet in length.



**Plant Your Poles.** Push your beanpoles 1 foot deep into the soil along the perimeter of your measured circle, tilting the supports towards the center point. Beautiful bean teepees typically have anywhere between 3 and 10 poles, but don't forget to leave a small space for children to enter their bean-covered hideaway.



**Prepare the Soil for Planting.** A few days before planting your seeds, till a square foot of soil (width and depth) around your poles. While beans are notorious for their nitrogen-fixing capacity, you may need to initially enrich your soil before the plants sprout and mature. Depending on how much nutrient assistance your soil needs, try adding peat moss, compost, or manure to the soil around your fort. Your beans will love the extra organic content.



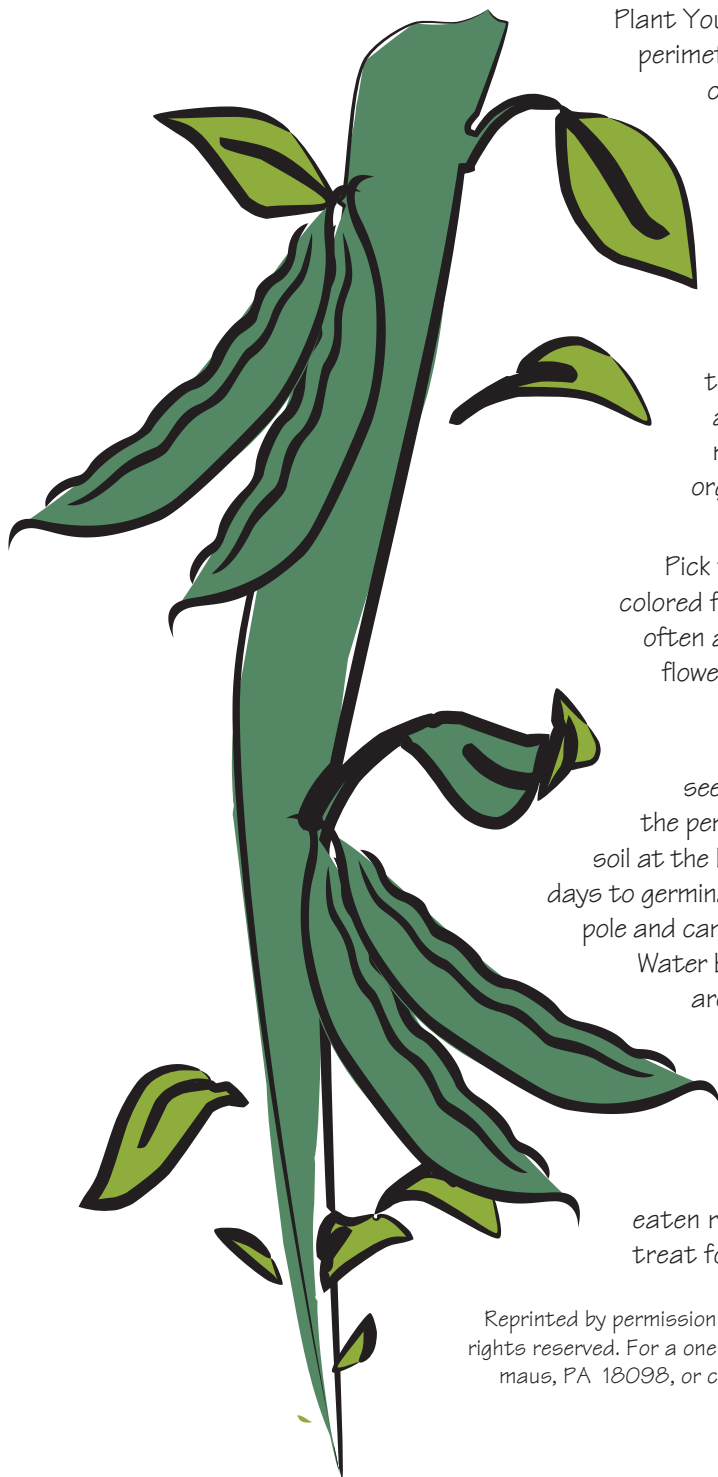
**Pick the Right Seed.** Fast-growing runner beans with bright, warm-colored flowers like 'Scarlet Runner', 'Emperor Scarlet', and 'Red Knight' often attract hummingbirds. 'Painted Ladies', with orange and white flowers, also make excellent choices for your beanstalk fort.



**Sow Seeds and Monitor.** Since beans are sensitive to frost, sow seeds 2-3 weeks after the last frost date. At this point, soil will be the perfect warm temperature. Sow 4 bean seeds an inch deep into the soil at the base of each pole. Seeds should take anywhere between 6 and 10 days to germinate. Once seedlings have sprouted, thin them to 1-2 plants per pole and carefully coax plants around each stake as they continue to grow. Water beans regularly and remind your children to be gentle while playing around the stalks.



Your beanstalk fort should be ready to harvest in 60-70 days, with mature pods growing up to 8 inches long. Be sure to pick the beans when they are fresh and young, as vines will continue to produce new pods until frost. Whether eaten raw or cooked, homegrown beans are a healthy and delicious treat for you and your students.



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