

Heritage vegetable review

Carouby de Maussane

Age: considered quite old, 19th century at least

Background: mangetout variety originating in France

My supplier: Thomas Etty Esq.

Pros: prolific, huge pods borne in pairs, beautiful flowers

Cons: flavour doesn't suit all tastes

Although it's not widely available commercially, this vintage "cabbage type" pea **Carouby de Maussane** has been enjoying a small-scale renaissance among heritage vegetable enthusiasts and is now one of the easier varieties to seek out.

The pods are truly enormous.



I don't personally know of any other pea with pods anywhere near as large, and although mine took a while to start producing, once they start off they get very big very quickly. Remarkably they retain their flavour even when they reach a huge size, and although they do start to go a bit stringy it's very easy to pull off the strings, leaving the rest of the pod with a melt-in-the-mouth tenderness. Maybe a little too tender for some tastes ... if you like your mangetouts crisp and crunchy then this isn't the variety for you, as the pods are very soft indeed after cooking. Cook them too much and they're borderline mushy. They don't develop any fibre layer at any stage, which is unusual. Pod flavour is old-fashioned, strong and robust ... what I would call a 'green' flavour with a hint of bitterness. But I did find the flavour varied considerably from pod to pod (irrespective of size) with some a lot tastier than others, which makes it difficult to give a meaningful description.

Eight peas per pod is about average. Not that it makes much difference if you're eating the whole pod. Seeds are brownish and dimpled.

Carouby de Maussane is extremely attractive in the garden. Even at the seedling stage, it has a graceful form and deep pink splotches of pigmentation in the leaf axils. The plants grow to around 5ft tall and need something to cling to, producing dark and fleshy leaves and closely curled tendrils. The flowers are exceptional, although they don't open up fully (a rare trait, **Golden Sweet** being one of the few other peas that does this). The colour is very intense and goes through various changes. Young flowers are a deep dusky pink, maturing through purply shades to a lovely sky blue. The wing petal, which is much less visible than on other pea varieties, is deep velvety maroon. Flowers are borne in pairs, and curled downward slightly so you have to get down on a low level to see inside them. There is a strong dark veining on the backs of the petals, which greatly adds to their attractiveness.



Photo: The flowers are exceptionally beautiful, despite never fully opening, and change colour as they mature.

For me personally this is not a favourite, and I find the erratic and strong flavour not absolutely to my tastes. But to others it may well be a gourmet variety, so don't be put off trying it. It's certainly beautiful in the garden with its intensely coloured flowers, and the huge pods borne in pairs make for a very respectable yield. I'm sure somebody with better culinary skills than me could come up with some excellent ways to use this pea to get the best out of it. And to be honest you could grow it in the flower border just for its beauty.



If you're interested in pea breeding **Carouby de Maussane** would be a good choice to experiment with because it has several unique or unusual traits and clearly differs from modern conventional peas. It would bring some much needed genetic diversity to the mix and it'd be a good source of genes for large pods and beautiful flowers amongst other things.

Photo: You can leave the pods to reach this huge size before harvesting, without compromising the flavour or the tenderness.

