



PEPPERS

Growing Requirements

- Sun – Peppers need a minimum of 6 hours of sun daily. Peppers need a long warm growing season, with daytime temperatures of 75-85°F and nighttime temperatures between 55-65°F. They grow slowly in cool weather and are frost sensitive. When daytime temperatures approach 100°F, pollination, fruit set and yield are reduced.
- Soil – Peppers will grow in most soils if there is good drainage. It is recommended to amend the soil with compost for better results.
- Water – Regular watering is needed to maintain uniform soil moisture at the root zone. Peppers are deep rooted, to about 20 inches deep, so less frequent but deep irrigation is recommended.
- Mulch – Apply a mulch to help maintain uniform soil moisture and prevent weeds.
- Fertilizer – Mix organic fertilizer into the soil according to package directions when planting. It is not necessary to fertilize again until blossoms appear, then fertilize lightly if desired every 2-4 weeks until the end of harvest.
- Support – Some varieties do benefit from stakes, cages or other support systems.

When to Plant

Plant seeds directly into the ground when air temperatures are about 77°F or higher. Start seeds indoors four to six weeks sooner and transplant seedlings when weather is warmer. Generally, peppers can be planted from seed and transplants in April – May.

Varieties

Sweet Peppers – These large-fruited mild-flavored bell peppers include *bell*, *banana*, *pimiento*, and *sweet cherry*.

- *Bell peppers* usually have a blocky appearance, and are commonly harvested when green, although they turn red or yellow when fully ripe. There are more than 200 varieties, including yellow, purple and other colors.
- *Banana peppers* are long and tapering and harvested when yellow, orange or red.
- *Pimiento peppers* are small, conical, thick-walled. They are usually used when fully ripe, red colored.
- *Cherry peppers* vary in size and flavor, and are harvested when orange to deep red.

Hot Peppers – These hot varieties come in a variety of shape, colors and potency. Hot peppers are usually allowed to ripen fully and change colors (except for *jalapenos*) and have smaller, longer, thinner and more tapering fruits than sweet peppers. Yields are smaller for hot peppers. Allow hot peppers intended for drying to ripen on the plant; they turn red and can be cut from the stem and hung to dry. Hot peppers include *cayenne*, *celestial*, *large cherry*, *Serrano*, *Tabasco*, *jalapeno*.

- *Tabasco peppers* are small, slender and pointed. They taste extremely hot and include varieties such as *Chili Piquin* and *Small Red Chili*.
- The *hot cayenne pepper* group fruits are slim, pointed, and slightly twisted. They can be harvested when they are either green or red. Varieties include *Anaheim*, *cayenne*, *Serrano*, *jalapeno*.
- *Celestial peppers* are small, cone shaped and very hot. They vary in color from yellow to red to purple and are attractive to grow.

Harvesting

Harvest fruits of mild peppers when they are green or red-ripe. When allowed to mature on the plant, most varieties turn red, are sweeter, and increase in vitamin A and C content. Cut, instead of pulling, to avoid breaking branches.

Allow hot peppers intended for drying to ripen on the plant. Hot peppers turn red when ripe; they may then be cut with one inch of stem attached, strung on a thread, and hung in a sunny place until dry and brittle. Use a sharp knife for cutting, as the stems are tough.

Common Problems

Flower Drop, Poor Fruit Set – Flowers on the pepper plants drop off or don't set fruit; the most likely cause is that temperatures are too cold.

Symptoms – Plants grow slowly; flowers form but drop off before fruit develops.

Solution – Because peppers need at least 6 hours of direct sun daily, with daytime temperatures of 75-85°F and night time temperatures between 55-65°F, it is advisable to wait for warmer weather and see if they grow and set fruit better, or replant them when weather warms up. Be sure to plant varieties adapted for the climate in which they are planted.

Blossom End Rot – Peppers develop a sunken, water-soaked spot at the end of the fruit. Blossom end rot is a physiological disease that is caused by environmental conditions, not a microorganism. The disease is not associated with soil contact or with damage to other plant parts.

Symptoms – A large, water-soaked spot develops at the end of ripening peppers. The spot gets larger, turns black and mold may develop. It is caused by a low level of calcium in the fruit and water balance in the plant, made worse by high soil salt and low soil moisture.

Solutions – Water consistently to keep the roots evenly moist but not soggy. Fertilize according to package instructions. Since the disease is not caused by a pathogen, pesticides are not effective.

Misshapen Fruit – Fruit on pepper plants is oddly shaped and the yield is low. Adult pepper weevils are small, dark, robust snout beetles with beaks longer than their head and thorax. Larvae and pupae can be found inside fruit.

Symptoms – Buds or fruits turn yellow and may drop from the plant. The remaining pods may become misshapen and develop yellow or red blotches. Pods are marred by holes.

Solutions - Destroying pepper plants as soon as the harvest is over should reduce weevil problems the following year. Rotate crops, not replanting where other nightshade family members have grown. The nightshade family includes peppers, tomatoes, eggplant and white potatoes.

Advice to grow by . . . ask us.

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