

Peppers

Peppers are produced on bushy plants that can reach 3 ft. in height. Pepper fruits come in many colors such as red, orange, yellow, brown, green and purple. They also grow in a variety sizes, shapes and flavors. Peppers are a warm season vegetable. They do not tolerate frost. Pungent types, referred to commonly as chile peppers, are mostly in the same species as sweet pepper types- *Capsicum annum*. Planting sweet types next to hot types will not make the sweet peppers hot.

Plant peppers in well drained soil or large pots on your deck after all danger of frost has passed.

Peppers can be divided into three groups which can all be grown successfully in the mid-Atlantic region:

1. Sweet varieties include bell, banana, sweet cherry, pimiento;
2. Hot varieties, such as serrano, jalapeno, cayenne, habanero, piquin, tabasco; and
3. Southwestern/Mexican varieties, such as numex, poblano, pasilla, mulatto.

Time to Harvest:

- Sweet and hot types -- 70-85 days from transplanting;
- Southwestern/Mexican varieties such as Numex or Anaheim types, Pasilla, Poblano, Serrano, Habanero types -- 100-120 days from transplanting.

Planting:

Start seeds indoors 8-10 weeks before the average frost-free date. Set out transplants after soil has thoroughly warmed in the spring.

Cultivation: Peppers generally have a long growing season and suffer slow growth during cool periods. Pinch out early flower buds and small fruits to produce stronger, more prolific plants. Black plastic mulch is an excellent garden aid for speeding growth, conserving water, and reducing weeds. Mature pepper stems can become brittle and should be supported with cages or short trellises.

Very hot temperatures will slow or stop pod production. Plant peppers where they will receive some late afternoon shade and cool down your plants with a water spray during hot, dry weather.

- **Fertilizer needs:** Light-medium feeder. Use starter fertilizer for transplants; side-dress with ¼ lb. of 10-10-10 or equivalent per 10 ft. of row after first fruits set.
- **Weeding:** Weeds can be controlled by the use of mulch. Try black plastic mulch, newspaper, straw, dry grass clippings or dried leaves.
- **Watering:** Uniform soil moisture is the goal when watering. Too much water can lead to root rot and sudden death. Too little water can cause blossom drop, small fruit, and blossom end rot. Drip irrigation or soaker hoses are excellent methods for watering peppers.

Harvesting:

Harvest sweet peppers when they reach full size. Hot peppers can be harvested green or allowed to ripen and change color on the plant. When allowed to mature on the plant most varieties turn red, yellow, purple, orange, or brown, are sweeter (if they are sweet cultivars), and increase in vitamin A and C content. Cut pods, rather than pulling, to avoid breaking branches. Entire plants may be pulled just before a killing frost and hung upside down in a warmer area, such as a garage, to ripen.

Storage and Preservation:

Medium cool (45 - 50°F), moist (95% RH) conditions; 2 to 3 weeks.

Nutrition: Good source of vitamins A, C, K, B6, and certain phytonutrients.

Preparation and use:

Choose firm, smooth, brightly colored peppers without soft spots or wrinkled skin. Wash thoroughly, cut around the stem and remove the core and seeds. Cut the pepper in half and trim any of the light colored flesh remaining inside. Serve peppers raw, baked, roasted, sautéed or grilled.

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