



Pepper Planting Guide

About Peppers

Sweet or hot, peppers hold a formidable place in the garden and on the table. A wonderful part of every summer garden, as they open up the summer diet to salsa and stuffing, raw snacking and BBQ skewers. Hot peppers bring out the bravado in us while sweeter ones refresh our palates with their irresistible, juicy crunch,

When to Plant

Pepper seeds should be started indoors approximately 8-10 weeks before last expected frost date. Temperatures must be at least 70 degrees for good germination rates.

Where to Plant

Choose a well-drained site that gets at least 8 hours of sunlight a day. Peppers need very fertile soil, so add lots of compost. Ensure the planting bed is well-drained, but that the plants receive consistent moisture -- plastic sheeting or mulch is a good idea for retaining moisture, and a drip irrigation system can be a good approach as well.

How to Plant

When starting seeds, start 3 to a pot, planting 1/4" deep. Thin the weakest seedling, leaving the remaining 2 to grow as 1 plant. Approximately 1 week before transplanting, harden off seedlings. Prepare your plot with fertilizer and organic material. Seedling pairs should be placed about 12-18" apart. Peppers will appreciate a stake or cage for stability.

Caring for Peppers

Be careful not to overwater peppers, but water deeply every 2nd or 3rd day to encourage deep root development. Nip off the first flower buds that appear. After the next set of flowers have turned into baby peppers, side dress with a balanced organic fertilizer, such as compost, around the base of the plants. In hot climates, shade peppers by planting them in the shadow of taller crops, such as corn or trellised beans, or in a dense block to help protect the fruit from the bright afternoon sun. Sweet peppers can be harvested when they're just starting to turn color and can ripen indoors at room temperature. You may also leave them on the plant until they reach full ripeness. Pick chile peppers as you need them. Harvest all fruit before the first frost. Most sweet and hot peppers require about 75 days from transplanting until the first fruits are ready. Some hot peppers can require anywhere from 90 to 120 frost free days to reach harvest.