

HOW TO GROW WITH



PEPPERS



FIRST THINGS FIRST. Your plants may arrive dry and thirsty. Give them a drink, watering until the pot turns dark brown. Keep plants in a bright spot protected from cold, and plant after the last frost. Follow planting directions on the pot label or see the video at bonnieplants.com/growing/growing-peppers.



GETTING STARTED

People who think they don't like peppers often change their minds once they have tasted fully ripened, garden-grown peppers. By growing an assortment of pepper varieties, you can have mild, meaty peppers for salads and stir-fries, slightly spicy peppers for fresh salsas, and hot peppers for bold jolts of flavor. Growing an assortment also helps ensure that you have peppers ripening all through the season. For example, under hot summer conditions, varieties that bear huge fruits (such as bells) may temporarily shed their blossoms, but small, thin-walled peppers (such as bananas) often keep going strong. Similarly, small-fruited peppers ripen faster, which is important in cool climates where summers are short.

Having a late cold spell? If planting is delayed due to cool weather in spring, keep your seedlings indoors at night and move them to a protected sunny spot outdoors during the day. While you await better planting conditions, you also can try this trick: Place 2 inches of moist potting soil in a 6-inch-wide container, gently break open the bottom of the biodegradable Bonnie pot, and nestle the pepper seedling (one per container) into the soil about 1 inch deep. A bit of extra downward growing room will ensure that each plant's primary taproot has ample space for expansion. Later on, after you plant the pepper outside, this taproot will become the plant's lifeline.

PLANTING

Peppers are easy to grow in any sunny, well-drained spot, and they are good candidates for roomy containers, too. Set plants out a week or two after your last frost, when the weather is settled and the temperature warms. All peppers share a preference for a long, warm growing season. Peppers have a naturally upright growth habit, so they often benefit from staking, which keeps branches from breaking when they become heavy with fruit. Install stakes or cages at planting time. Follow spacing guidelines found on the plant's stick tag.

Prepare the soil. Peppers grow best in near-neutral soil with a pH between 6.2 and 7.0, although they can tolerate slightly alkaline conditions up to 7.5. Mix a 3- to 5-inch layer of compost into each planting hole. A generous amount of organic matter provides nutrients and helps the soil retain moisture.

Plant right. Set plants at the same depth at which they are growing in their containers. After planting, water well, then mulch each plant to keep the soil cool and moist.

Grow in containers. Peppers are easy to grow in pots if you use a big container (18 to 24 inches in diameter). Fill it with premium quality potting mix and mix in some compost. Keep the soil moist so the plant grows full-sized, healthy fruit.

FERTILIZING

Feed at planting with Bonnie Herb, Vegetable & Flower Plant Food to give peppers a healthy boost. They will love the naturally based formula made from oilseed extract. Follow label directions—don't overdo it. Continue to apply every 1 to 2 weeks.



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PEPPERS

ABOUT PEPPER HEAT LEVELS

While you can blindly taste a pepper to determine its heat, that's not a recommended method—ouch! Instead, use the Scoville scale. Pepper heat is measured in Scoville Heat Units, with the hottest peppers having the highest numbers. You'll see these numbers listed for all of the hot peppers on our website.

The range of Scoville units typically used to call a pepper mild, medium, hot, or extra hot are:

Mild (100 to 2,500)

Medium (2,500 to 30,000)

Hot (30,000 to 100,000)

Extra Hot (100,000 to 300,000+)

Here are the heat levels for some popular hot peppers:

■ Habanero:

Extra Hot (100,000 to 300,000)

■ Tabasco:

Hot (30,000 to 50,000)

■ Cayenne:

Hot (30,000 to 50,000)

■ Jalapeño:

Medium (2,500 to 5,000)

■ Poblano (Ancho):

Mild (1,000 to 2,000)

WHAT COLOR SHOULD MY PEPPERS BE?

As peppers change from green to yellow, orange, or red, both their flavor and their vitamin content improve dramatically. This means that sweet peppers get sweeter, and hot peppers get hotter. For specific information about the ripe color of your varieties, consult the variety descriptions on our website.

RECIPES

With so many varieties, types, and flavors of peppers, there are endless ways to use them in the kitchen. Whether you want to eat them fresh, cooked, dried, or pickled, go to bonnieplants.com/cooking to find recipes for your pepper harvest.



TROUBLESHOOTING

Peppers have few serious pest problems, and common pepper diseases can be prevented by growing resistant varieties. Plants that look frail and stringy may be infected with viruses, which are spread by aphids and other small insects. Chronically thirsty peppers may be troubled by root-knot nematodes.

Gardeners in warm climates may need to be patient with big bell and sweet roasting pepper plants, which can often pause production in hot weather. When nights become longer and cooler in late summer, they should resume loading up with fruit. The wait will go by faster if you have less flashy (yet really productive) banana peppers to combine with tomatoes and basil in cool summer salads while bigger varieties take their time ripening.

HARVESTING & USING

Use pruning shears or a sharp knife to cut peppers with a short stub of stem attached. Don't pull peppers by hand, which can cause the entire branch to break off. Rinse peppers with water, pat them dry, then store them in the refrigerator. Fruits that are not eaten fresh can be dried, frozen, or pickled. Peppers harvested in cool fall weather may have just begun to change colors and will often continue to ripen for up to 3 days when kept in a warm room indoors. Watch for signs of softening, and promptly refrigerate or use fruits that begin to shrivel. A pepper plant may have numerous green fruits when the first freeze kill it. Very immature peppers often taste bitter, so it is better to compost them than to serve them for dinner.

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