

Growing Peppers in Containers



Why grow peppers?

Peppers are both delicious and packed with nutrients. Red bell peppers pack 157% of the daily requirement of vitamin C, as well as vitamin A, potassium, folic acid and fiber. Compared to green bell peppers, the red ones have almost 11 times more beta-carotene and 1.5 times more vitamin C.

Peppers are one of the easiest crops to grow in containers. At 1-3 feet tall, they fit nicely in pots. They can be easily moved into a garage or house when weather becomes problematic. Growing peppers in containers frees up garden space and simplifies crop rotation with other members of the nightshade family.

Temperature

Peppers are grown as annuals in Colorado. Due to their tropical origins, they are very chill sensitive. They don't tolerate prolonged periods below 50° and won't set fruit in temperatures less than 60°.

Sweet peppers make their best vegetative growth between 65° and 85°. Temperatures above 90° cause the flowers to abort, but fruit that is already set will mature.

Hot peppers are slightly more heat tolerant. They grow best in temperatures above 75° and warm nighttime temperatures above 70°. Unlike sweet peppers, temperatures above 90° actually increase fruit set.

Planting and Care

Peppers love warm temperatures, so don't set them out too early. Transplant pepper seedlings outside well after the danger of frost has passed which is usually after May 15th in this area. Look for a soil temperature of 60° and nighttime air temperatures above 50°. Put containers in a location that gets 6+ hours of direct sun.

Choose a container that is a minimum of 16" wide and deep. Larger pots can support more than one plant.

Peppers need well-drained, fertile soil. Choose a good quality potting soil. It is a good idea to add a slow release fertilizer to the soil at planting time, and then supplement with liquid fertilizer while actively growing.

Peppers like evenly moist soil. Water at soil level, avoiding the leaves. Like tomatoes, peppers will develop blossom end rot if moisture levels are inconsistent. Check pots for moisture daily, and water as needed. Peppers will abort flowers if grown in waterlogged soils.

Harvesting

The fruit of most pepper varieties are green when immature and red when mature. Red sweet peppers are sweeter than green sweet peppers, and red hot peppers are hotter than most green hot peppers.

Pepper fruit matures in 60 to 100 days depending upon variety. It is usually best to choose varieties that mature more quickly as our growing season in Colorado is fairly short.

Pick the fruit at any time it has reached an acceptable size, usually 3-4 " in length. Use scissors to cut the stem from the plant, or snap off the fruit while supporting the rest of the plant to avoid damaging the main stem. Green fruit will ripen off the plant if stored above 50°.

Storage

Peppers will keep in the refrigerator for about 2 weeks. They can also be frozen for later use in sauces and soups. Drying peppers is easy—just lay them on a screen, or string them and hang them in a dry airy spot. Dried peppers remain flavorful for about a year if stored in clean, glass jars.

Suggested Varieties

Sweet Peppers

Better Belle produces large fruit (4 " tall and 5 " wide) on fast growing, vigorous plants. Consider staking to help the plant support the large fruit. Better Belle grows 18-24 " tall, making it a perfect size for containers with dependably high yields. They generally mature in 65-75 days.

Carmen Pepper was AAS winner in 2006. Elongated fruit grows to about 6" long. The medium thick flesh is the sweetest when it is red ripe, but Carmen peppers are sweet even when immature or green. Gardeners can look for red peppers about 75 days after transplanting. Carmen is medium height, about 28 to 30", fitting nicely into large patio containers.

Sweet Banana has been a popular pepper for more than 70 years. It produces mild, yellow peppers that ultimately turn bright red. It's also a favorite for pickling. They grow 18-24" tall and mature in 70-75 days.

Hot Peppers

Despite the name, Anaheim peppers originated in New Mexico. Anaheims are mildly spicy, and provide sweetness and crispy texture to many dishes. Plant height averages around 24", and fruit grows to 10" long. Anaheims are most often picked green.

Jalapeños are the classic hot pepper. Fruit is dark green, medium-hot, thick walled, and grow about 3 " long. Plants grow to 18-24" tall and mature in 75 days.

Shishito Peppers are a favorite Japanese variety, which produce 3-4" long, slightly wrinkled pepper. The fruit is emerald green, and mildly flavored with just a bit of spice. Their thin walls blister and char easily when roasted or grilled, taking on a rich flavor. Shishito peppers are typically harvested and used green, but eventually turn orange and develop a sweeter flavor. They mature in about 60 days (green), or 75 days (red).

References

Eating Peppers: Ingredients, Benefits, and Prep Tips. Source: www.webmd.com/diet/peppers-health-benefits

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