



## Peppers

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Figure 1: Miniature bell peppers change from purple to orange as they mature. K9299-1, USDA photo by John Stommel, February 12, 2013, Public Domain.

### Environmental Preferences

- Light:** Sunny
- Soil:** Well-drained loose soil with moderate organic matter
- Fertility:** Medium-rich. pH: 5.5 to 6.5
- Temperature:** Warm (70 to 75°F)
- Moisture:** Average

### Culture

- Planting:** Set out transplants after soil has thoroughly warmed in the spring. Start seed indoors six to eight weeks prior to this date.
- Spacing:** 18 to 24 inches by 30 to 36 inches.
- Fertilizer:** Light to medium feeder. Use starter solution for transplants. Sidedress cautiously after first fruit sets with 3 tablespoons 33-0-0 per 10-foot row;

too much fertilizer may cause excessive vegetative growth.

### Cultural Practices

Most peppers are classified according to their degree of hot or mild flavor. The mild peppers include Bell, Banana, Pimiento, and Sweet Cherry, while the hot peppers include the Cayenne, Celestial, Large Cherry, and Tabasco.

Bell peppers, commonly measuring 3 inches wide by 4 inches long, usually have 3 to 4 lobes and a blocky appearance. Green bell peppers can be left to turn red or yellow when fully ripe. Some varieties now produce orange, purple, yellow or even chocolate colored fruit. About 200 varieties are available. Banana peppers are long and tapering and harvested when yellow, orange, or red. Another sweet pepper, Pimiento, has conical, 2 to 3 inches wide by 4 inches long, thick-walled fruit. Most Pimientos are used when red and fully ripe. Cherry peppers vary in size and flavor. **Usually**, they are harvested when orange to deep red.



Figure 2: Bell peppers. 20201017-NRCS-LSC-0130, USDA Photo by Lance Cheung, Oct 17, 2020, Public Domain.

Slim, pointed, slightly twisted fruits characterize the hot Cayenne pepper group. These can be harvested either when green or red and include varieties such as Anaheim, Cayenne, Serrano, and Jalapeno. Large cherry peppers are very hot - milder than Serrano, but hotter than Jalapeno. Celestial peppers are cone shaped, 3/4 to 2 inches long, and very hot. They vary in color from yellow to red to purple, making them an attractive plant to grow. Slender, 1- to 3-inch, pointed Tabasco peppers taste extremely hot and include such varieties as Chili Piquin and Small Red Chili.

Peppers generally have a long growing season and suffer slow growth during cool periods. Therefore, after the soil has thoroughly warmed in the spring, set out 6- to 8-week-old transplants to get a head start toward harvest. Practice good cultivation and provide adequate moisture. Mulching can help to conserve water and reduce weeds.

Hot peppers are usually allowed to fully ripen and change colors (except for Jalapenos) and have smaller, longer, thinner, and more tapering fruits than sweet peppers. Yields are smaller for hot peppers.

## Common Problems

- Diseases:** Tobacco mosaic virus, bacterial spot, anthracnose, *cercospora* leaf spot, Phytophthora and Southern blights
- Insects:** Aphids, thrips, stinkbugs, European corn borer.
- Cultural:** Blossom-end rot from moisture irregularities or calcium deficiency; blossom drop from night temperatures rising above 75°F or excessive fruit set on entire crop.

## Harvesting and Storage

- Days to Maturity:** 100 to 120 days from seed; 70 to 85 days from transplants.
- Harvest:** Harvest sweet peppers when they reach full size. For maximum yield harvest while still green. When allowed to mature on the plant, most

varieties turn red, sweeten, and increase in vitamins A and C content. Cut instead of pulling to avoid breaking branches. Most hot peppers are allowed to ripen and change color on the plant. Entire plants may be pulled and hung just before full frosts.

**Approximate Yields:** 2 to 8 pounds per 10-foot row.

**Amount to Raise:** 3 to 10 pounds per person.

**Storage:** Medium-cool (45 to 50°F), moist (95% relative humidity) conditions for two to three weeks.

**Preservation:** Freeze; use in pickles and relishes or dried as spices.

## Acknowledgement

This publication was part of a larger Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-312 on Potatoes, Peppers and Eggplants.

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2025

SPES-684NP