



Sweet and hot peppers

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- Peppers are in the same family as tomatoes and eggplant (Solanaceae) and have similar growing requirements.
- Start seeds indoors 6-8 weeks before the last frost or purchase transplants.
- Blossoms set fruit best between 70-90 degrees Fahrenheit.

Planting

All peppers are warm-season plants and prefer warm soil. Do not plant outside until after frost danger has passed. Amend the soil with organic compost and loosen the soil to a depth of 8-12 inches. Spacing depends on variety, but most peppers plants grow to 2 feet in diameter. It is okay if the top foliage touches slightly - it will shade the fruit and roots as the summer gets hotter. Use a cage or stakes to protect the stems from high wind.

Mix two tablespoons of epsom salt in the planting site to increase the amount of magnesium available. Drip watering is the best way to prevent diseases and keep watering to a minimum, which is best for hot peppers. If drip irrigation is not available, water in the morning so foliage will dry before nightfall. A layer of mulch is also crucial, especially for sweet peppers because their roots tend to be shallow. Fertilizer regularly with a balanced fertilizer (10-10-10) or a bloom formula (10-20-10.) Sweet peppers grow best where the soil temperatures stay moist and cool in the summer months. Keep hot peppers slightly drier than sweet peppers.

The temperature range for fruit to set is limited even more than tomatoes. When nighttime temperatures fall below 60 degrees or stay above 75, flowers are likely to drop off. Daytime temperatures above 90 degrees will also prohibit fruit set, but fruits will begin to form again when cool daytime temperatures return.

Harvest

Ripening from green to red seems to take forever, but it will happen when the plant is ready. Peppers can be picked as soon as a small amount of color is showing and they will finish ripening indoors with full sweetness and with less likelihood of insect damage. Use pruners to remove the peppers from the stem to avoid damaging the plant. If a heavy frost is expected, harvest all peppers and allow them to ripen indoors.