



PICK A PEPPER TO ADD COLOR AND SPICE TO YOUR GARDEN

Peppers are undemanding and often attractive plants that require only warm weather, a sunny location, well-drained soil, and an occasional application of fertilizer to yield a bountiful crop. And with so many new varieties and types to choose from, there is a pepper to delight every gardener.

If you want to grow peppers from seed, start them indoors in flats about eight to ten weeks before they are to be transplanted outside. Keep the soil warm, as peppers germinate very slowly in cool soil. Transplant to cell packs or small pots when the seedlings show their first true leaves and grow in a warm, sunny spot or under plant lights. Do not transplant outside until all danger of frost is over and night temperatures stay above 50°. If all this seems like too much work for you, purchase started plants at your local nursery and plant them directly into your garden when temperatures are consistently warm.

You do not have to have a separate vegetable garden to grow peppers. Consider growing peppers near the kitchen, if possible, where they will be convenient to care for and harvest. With their glossy foliage and colorful fruits, many peppers are attractive enough to mingle with flowers in the border or in patio containers, and in fact there is a whole category of ornamental peppers that were developed solely for their decorative qualities.

Sweet peppers are available in great variety, some sporting the familiar large, bell-type fruits that are perfect for stuffing, others more long and slender—great for salads or roasting.

- * If you have the space, try ‘Big Bertha,’ a robust variety that bears really huge peppers up to 4 inches wide and 6 to 7 inches long. Harvest the peppers when they are green, or let them mature to a beautiful deep red.
- * ‘Fat ‘N’ Sassy’ produces perfect blocky stuffing peppers about 4 ½ inches tall and wide, and it matures early. Fruit can be harvested when red or green, and it is sweet and thick-walled.
- * For exceptionally sweet flavor, plant ‘Carmen.’ This Italian-type pepper was an All America Selections Winner in 2006, and it is delicious both raw and cooked. Its horn-shaped fruits are especially attractive, and the adaptable plants work well in containers.
- * If you’re seeking a variety of colors, consider planting a mix. ‘Sweet Rainbow Mix’ features large, blocky bell peppers in a kaleidoscope of hues including white, yellow, orange, red, lilac, purple and chocolate-brown.

As more people are experimenting with ethnic dishes, **hot peppers** are becoming increasingly popular. Most varieties are versatile, and can be used fresh or dried. Keep in mind that not all hot peppers pack the same punch, though—they range in heat from mildly pungent to scorching hot.

‘Holy Mole’ is a new, mildly hot Pasillo pepper, and an All America Selections Winner for 2007. Long, slender peppers start out green, then turn a rich, chocolate-brown at maturity. As the name

suggests, these nutty, tangy peppers are perfect for making mole sauce and can be used fresh, pickled, dried or ground. Plants are disease resistant and produce abundantly.

- * For slightly more heat, plant some 'Garden Salsa.' This moderately hot pepper is long and slender, green to red. Use for making Mexican sauces and salsa.
- * 'Mariachi Hybrid' is a versatile variety with high yields and delicious, mildly hot flavor. An All America Selection Winner in 2006, its 3 ½-inch fruits are yellow-green to red and may be roasted, used fresh, or pickled.
- * 'Jalapeno' is a hotter pepper. Its 3 ½" fruits are green to red and make great toppers for nachos.
- * Those desiring a really hot pepper will want to try 'Caribbean Red Hot.' Similar to the fiery Habanero pepper, the 1 to 2-inch, wrinkled fruit starts out green and turn deep red at maturity.

Ornamental peppers are an easy way to pep up garden borders and containers. Their attractive, glossy foliage stays neat and tidy, and the brilliant fruits add non-stop color. Most are edible, also, but *very hot*—try at your own risk!

- * 'Black Pearl' was an All America Selections Winner for 2006. The foliage on this unique variety starts out green, but quickly matures to an almost black color. Small round fruits start out black, and mature to red, resemble little pearls. With its striking foliage, gorgeous fruits, and tidy habit, this plant is a valuable addition to mixed patio containers and ornamental borders.



Ornamental Pepper 'Black Pearl' has beautiful fruits.

- * 'Explosive Embers' is an extra early variety with long slender peppers that change color, resulting in a colorful display of purple, yellow, orange and red peppers all at the same time—a bright addition to any sunny border or container.
- * 'Chilly Chili' bears milder fruit, safe to plant where children might want to sample it. The 2" fruits start out greenish yellow, gradually change to orange, and mature to a deep, dark red on 9 to 10-inch plants.

Don't shy away from peppers because you don't have a vegetable garden. Most require very little space to grow, and they mix well with sun-loving annuals, perennials and herbs. They're an inexpensive and fun way to experiment with new colors and flavors.