

# Growing Your Own

## A beginner's guide to gardening

# Peppers

**P**eppers are relatively easy to grow and can provide a consistent crop throughout the summer. You can eat them raw or cooked to add flavor to many foods.

## Varieties

Peppers come in many varieties. Most will grow well in Kentucky. Many heirloom, or vintage, varieties exist as well. Peppers are set apart by their shape or spiciness (heat).

Look for these kinds of plants:

### Sweet (bell) varieties (color at maturity)

- Aristotle (red)
- North Star (red)
- Karisma (red)
- King Arthur (red)
- Purple Beauty (purple)
- Socrates (red)
- Valencia (yellow/orange)



Sweet (bell) peppers (*Capsicum annuum*).

(Photo: Gerald Holmes, California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo, Bugwood.org)

### Hot varieties

- Emerald Fire (Jalapeño—green to red)
- Giant Ristra (Anaheim Chili—red)
- Cayennetta (Chili—red)



Aji Rico F1 pepper (*Capsicum baccatum*).  
(Photo: All-American Selections)

### Banana type

- Hungarian Yellow Wax (yellow)
- Hot Sunset (orange)
- Inferno (red)
- Sweet Sunset (orange)



Sweet Sunset peppers (*Capsicum annuum*).  
(Photo: All-American Selections)



## How much to plant

Buy plants that are several inches tall to transplant into your garden. About three to four hot pepper plants and six to eight sweet pepper plants should be enough for a family of four or five.



Make a hole in the soil for the pepper transplant. (Photo: Matt Barton)

## How and when to plant

Peppers are a warm weather crop. Plant them after all danger of frost has passed. Safe days for planting in Kentucky begin around May 15.

Try to transplant the pepper plants in the evening or on a cloudy day to avoid stressing the plants with heat. Young plants can dry out and wilt on a hot or windy day. Peppers should be planted about 18 inches apart in rows about 3 feet wide. Peppers also do well when planted in large pots or other containers.



Make sure the roots of the pepper plant are covered with soil and the transplant is standing straight up. (Photo: Matt Barton)





A cutworm eating the stem of a plant. (Photo: R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company Slide Set, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, Bugwood.org)

## Insects and pests

Insects usually do not bother peppers. Protect young transplants from cutworms by placing a small cardboard cylinder around the base of the plant, as you would with tomatoes. Sometimes, worms might bore into the pepper fruit, but this is not common and does not require use of pesticides. Peppers benefit from being moved to a different part of the garden every year to reduce diseases. If your garden is small, consider growing them every few years in a container separate from the garden. For more information on managing pests and diseases, contact your county extension agent or consult the UK Cooperative Extension publication *Growing Vegetables at Home in Kentucky* (ID-128).

## Harvesting

Peppers are flavorful when picked at any time of development. Picking young peppers will encourage more to grow on the plant. However, flavor is best when the peppers are allowed to grow and fully mature.

Bell peppers are best when they are about the size of a baseball. If green bell peppers are left on the plant, they will turn red and will taste sweeter, but the plant will produce fewer fruits if you allow the peppers to turn red.

You should pick hot peppers when they turn yellow or red, depending on the variety, but remember that some peppers just stay green.



Chili Pie F1 pepper (*Capsicum annuum*). (Photo: All-American Selections)



Chili Pie F1 pepper (*Capsicum annuum*). (Photo: All-American Selections)

If you pick peppers as soon as they are ready, more will grow. The first peppers will be ready about six to eight weeks after you transplant the pepper plants into your garden.

## Serving

All colors of peppers are good sources of vitamin C, have some vitamin A, and contain small amounts of several minerals. Red peppers have more vitamin A than green peppers.

Peppers can be eaten raw or cooked. Eat them as a crisp snack, or cut them into rings to decorate food. Add peppers to salads or casseroles. Stuff peppers with seasoned bread crumbs or meat, and bake them. Use hot peppers to add a spicy flavor to salsa and other foods.

## Storing

Peppers taste best when they are stored at room temperature, but they might dry and shrivel after a few days. They will keep longer in a refrigerator crisper drawer, but the flavor might not be as good.

Freeze peppers whole or in slices. Peppers that were frozen without blanching are best added to uncooked foods. Blanched peppers are easier to pack, and they are best in cooked foods, like sauces.

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