

## Pepper

Peppers are warm-weather vegetables that require about 1½ months to fully develop. Some what finicky, peppers need even temperatures and uniform moisture to develop fully.

### Varieties

Pepper varieties, of which there are hundreds, are divided into two main classes: sweet and hot. Eat sweet peppers raw in salads, cooked, or dried. Dry hot peppers and serve in a variety of spicy recipes. Good varieties of sweet peppers include: 'Bell Boy,' 'California Wonder,' 'New Ace,' 'Tokyo Bell,' and 'Yolo Wonder.' Favorite varieties of hot peppers are 'Hot Portugal,' 'Hungarian Wax,' 'Mexi Bell,' and 'Long Red Cayenne.' 'Super Chili' is as good looking as it is edible.

### Planting

Start pepper plants from seeds indoors six to eight weeks before the last expected frost. Or purchase transplants from a local garden center. Plant only after the soil is thoroughly warm. Set in a sunny spot. Prepare a loose bed with lots of organic matter to retain moisture. Put cutworm collars on the plants if these insects have been a problem before. Space plants roughly 2 feet apart. To protect young plants from cold and sun until they are growing well, use cloches or shades (such as a shingle placed next to each plant).

### Care

Provide uniform moisture to help the plants grow and produce abundantly. Water whenever the soil starts to dry out. Improper watering can result in sunken brown spots on the fruit. Mulch around each plant with an organic material such as grass clippings or shredded leaves. Pull all weeds as soon as they appear. Avoid cultivating around the bases of the plants because their root systems are shallow. Fertilize regularly to stimulate production.

### Harvest

Pick sweet peppers when either green (immature) or red (mature). Let hot peppers dry as much as possible on the plants themselves. Then pick the hot peppers and continue the drying process in a hot, airy spot. Grind or shred hot peppers for use. Always wear rubber gloves when handling hot peppers.