

Easy Gardening...Peppers

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Peppers are a warm season crop that will grow in most Texas areas. They grow in all types of soils but do best in heavier, well drained soils. Peppers should be planted in areas with at least 6 hours of sunlight each day.

Varieties

Sweet Peppers	Hot Peppers
Bell Tower Shamrock California Wonder Keystone Resistant Giant Yolo Wonder	Hungarian Wax Long Red Cayenne Jalapeno TAM Mild Jalapeno Hidalgo Serrano

Soil Preparation

Work the soil 8-10 inches deep several weeks before planting. Rake it several times to break up the large clods. Add large amounts of organic (natural) matter especially if your soil is heavy clay. Work it into the soil. You can use compost, peat moss, rotted hay or other organic matter. Work the soil only when it is dry enough not to stick to garden tools.

Fertilizing

Add 2-3 pounds of fertilizer such as 10-10-10 per 100 square feet of garden area. Spread the fertilizer evenly over the garden. Work it into the soil. If you are going to plant single plants, place about 2 level tablespoons of fertilizer on the soil in the planting area. Mix it well with the soil. See figure 1.

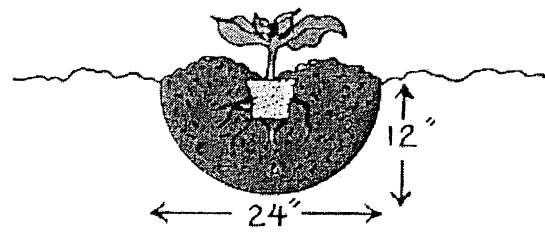


Figure 1. For single plants, work organic matter and 2 tablespoons of fertilizer into the planting area

Planting

Since most families need only a few plants, it is best to buy plants rather than grow them from seed. Buy healthy plants 4-6 inches tall. About three to four hot pepper plants and eight to ten sweet pepper plants usually are enough for a family of four. See figure 2.

Peppers grow best in warm weather. Do not plant them until all danger of cold weather has passed. Plant fall peppers 12-16 weeks before the first expected frost.

Make the transplant holes 3-4 inches deep and about 1 1/2 feet apart in the row. Space the rows at least 3 feet apart. Before planting, fill the holes with water and let it soak in. Move the plants carefully from the box or flat and set them in the transplant holes. Leave as much soil as possible around the roots. Fill the hole with soil and pack it loosely around the plant. Do not cover the roots deeper than the original soil ball. Leave a slightly sunken area around each plant to hold water. Water the plants after planting. See figure 3.

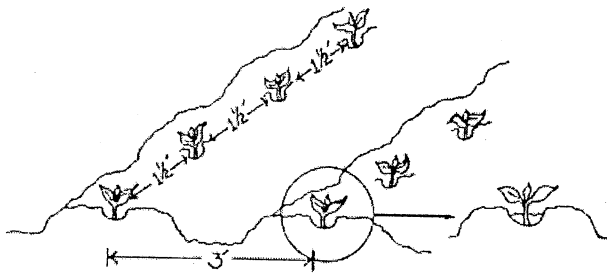


Figure 3. Plant peppers at least 1 1/2 feet apart, in slightly sunken area to hold water.

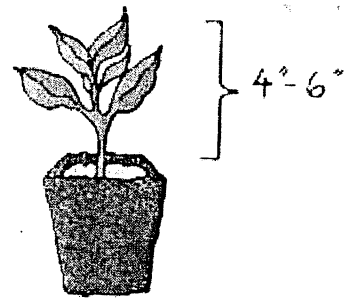


Figure 2. Buy pepper plants which are 4-6 inches tall and dark green in color.

Try to transplant peppers in the evening or on a cloudy day. This will keep the plants from wilting and getting too dry.

Watering

Water the plants enough to keep them from wilting. Slow, deep watering helps grow a strong root system. Do not let pepper plants wilt as this will reduce yield and quality of the fruit.

Care During the Season

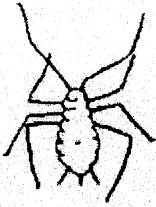

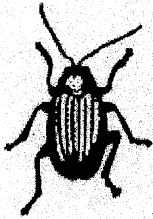
Hoe or till the soil lightly. Deep tilling cuts the pepper roots and causes slow growth. Hand pull weeds which are close to the plants.

After the first fruit begins to enlarge, place about 2 tablespoons of fertilizer around each plant about 6 inches from the stem. Water after adding the fertilizer. This will increase yield and quality of the peppers.

Diseases

In mild weather, diseases start easily. Leaf spots are caused by fungus and bacteria. If diseases become a problem, you may have to spray the plants. Ask your county Extension agent or gardening assistant what to use to control diseases.

Insects

Name	Description	Control
 Aphid	1/8 inch long; green, pink or brown; feeds on underside of leaves; sucks plant juices	Diazinon
 Leaf Miner	small, yellowish larva inside leaves; causes "tunnels or trails" on leaves	Diazinon
 Flea Beetle	1/16 inch long; metallic bronze, black bronze, black, blue or green; fast jumping; eats holes in leaves	Sevin

Harvesting

If peppers are picked as they mature, yields will be greater. The first peppers should be ready 8-10 weeks after transplanting. Pick bell peppers when they get shiny, dark green and firm. When left on the plant, most peppers will turn red and are still good to eat.

Harvest most hot peppers when they turn red or yellow, depending on the variety. Jalapenos are mature when they reach good size and become a deep, dark green.

Serving

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

Peppers are good raw or cooked. Eat them as a snack, to decorate food, or add them to salads and casseroles. Stuff peppers with seasoned bread crumbs or meat, and bake them.

Storing

Store peppers in the vegetable crisper to the refrigerator or other covered containers. Use them within 3-5 days after harvesting.

