



FACEBOOK LIVE SEMINAR

Tips for Growing Peppers

Whether you prefer the cool crunch of a sweet bell pepper or the feisty fire of a chili pepper, there's none more satisfying than those you've grown yourself. There are – literally – hundreds of varieties to choose from; deciding what to grow is half the fun! Follow these recommendations and be on your way to harvesting delicious peppers all season long.

PLAN

Set an expectation of how much food you are able to use. This will determine how many plants you will need (will you be canning, drying, etc.).

LOCATION, THE SUNNIER, THE BETTER

Peppers love the sun and require between 6 to 8 hours of full sun each day.

SOIL

Invest in your soil from the start to encourage a healthy environment for all your plants. Peppers prefer loose, well-drained soil, and a pH level between 5.5 to 6.5.

AMENDMENTS

For peppers, use compost and perlite.

Hampton Roads soil is mostly clay-based and needs to be amended. Break-up soil with compost and perlite, which allows for better airflow and helps water percolate down into the soil.

PRE-MIXED AMENDMENTS

- Potting Soil - for use in pots/containers. Helps to hold moisture in.

- Garden Soil - heavier and thicker than potting soil. Not recommended for containers, since it can clog drainage holes and cause plant roots to drown.
- Raised Bed Mix - pre-made mix made specifically for raised beds. Helps to hold in moisture.

SEED VS. PLANT

Starting from Seed - consider the amount of seeds that come in a pack. Do you really want to grow that many plants? Seeds also take about seven days to germinate and require an acclimation period when transitioning from indoor to outdoor planting.

Seeds can be stored in a cool, dark place for use later, however, germination will decrease over time.

Starter Plants – are garden-ready, offer a larger selection, and allow you to choose the number and varieties of plants you want to grow.

WHEN TO PLANT

In Hampton Roads, plant peppers between May 1 and May 15 when:

- Night-time temperatures are consistently above 60 degrees.
- Day-time temperatures are between 70-90 degrees.

Determine soil temperatures by:

- Searching online for your area's soil temperature.
- Search Bay temperatures – soil temperature is usually a few degrees behind bay temperature.
- Peppers will survive in cooler temps, but will not grow much until temperatures warm-up.

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CORPORATE
1139 W Pembroke Ave.
757.722.3125

INDEPENDENCE
1144 Independence Blvd.
757.464.5564

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1276 N Great Neck Rd.
757.962.7596





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Remember, you can plant in raised beds or containers earlier, since soil temperatures heat-up faster than in-ground soil temperatures.

WAYS TO GROW

- Raised Beds - this popular option offers less weed and pest issues and provides plants with nutrient-rich, homemade soil.
- Containers (plastic, ceramic, clay, hanging baskets, etc.) - ideal for small space gardening on patios, decks, and balconies.
- EarthBox® Kit - another container option that comes with everything you need to grow.
- In-ground Growing - allows for larger growing areas, and requires soil amendments that are added to the existing soil base. Peppers can also be grown alongside existing landscape plants (foodscaping).

WHY MULCH?

Wait to mulch peppers until temperatures begin to warm-up and your peppers begin to sprout.

Mulching helps to:

- Decrease the fluctuation of temperatures above and below ground.
- Helps retain moisture.
- Keep weeds out.
- Prevents dirt from splashing on lower leaves, helping to prevent the spread of disease.

Mulching can bring pH levels down. Add lime or Mag-i-Cal to bring pH back to desired levels.

STAKING OPTIONS FOR PEPPERS

Tomato cages – use a heavy gauged cage for better support. Cage peppers early (it's much harder to put a cage over a grown pepper).

Stakes - hardwood and bamboo stakes are both good options for staking peppers. Staking helps to prevent disease and insects (by keeping fruit off the ground), and helps with airflow.

Use ties to secure plants to cages or stakes as they grow. Tie options include:

- **Stretch tie** - an easy-to-use tape that stretches with the plant as it grows.
- **Twist ties or twine** - secure plants loosely to allow for plant growth.

PRUNING

Peppers require very little pruning.

- Some recommend removing the first set of flower buds, which allows the plant additional growing time. When pepper plants bloom, all their energy goes towards producing fruit, neglecting stem and leaf production. If blooms appear before the plant matures in size, the plant will remain undersized and may yield fewer fruits than it would if it were full size.
- Prune lower branches 6 to 12 inches off the ground.

Pruning helps to:

- Improves airflow, which helps to keep disease and fungus at a minimum.
- Keeps fruit off the ground (away from insects and other animals).

HARVESTING

Don't pull peppers off the stem. Use pruners or garden scissors to gently cut mature peppers from the stem. This will prevent the stem/branch from breaking.

We recommend disinfecting your pruners to help minimize the spread of disease from one plant to another. Fill a spray bottle with alcohol or mouthwash and spray pruners after each use.

continued on next page

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INSECTS AND DISEASE PREVENTION & TREATMENTS

Be proactive when it comes to disease and insect prevention. Inspect your plants often and remove and discard any diseased plants to prevent the spread of disease.

Organic Solutions for Treatment and Prevention of Diseases and Insects for Peppers:

Neem Oil, Spinosad Soap, Copper Soap Fungicide, and Ferti-lome Triple Action.

CROP ROTATION

Crop rotation involves changing the planting location of vegetables in the garden each season. Rotation helps to reduce damage from insect pests, limit the development of diseases, and helps keep your soil healthy and fertile.

FEED YOUR PLANTS

When fertilizing your peppers, look for 5-10-10 fertilizer, which contains half as much nitrogen as phosphate and potassium. A higher phosphate and potassium number will encourage more fruit production. A lower nitrogen number will help the plant grow.

We recommend the following fertilizers for peppers:

- **Espoma Organic Garden Tone** – a good option for both herbs and veggies.
- **Bio-Tone Starter Plus** - an all natural plant food enhanced with bio-stimulants, beneficial bacteria, and mycorrhizae. Bio-Tone works naturally within the soil to help plants establish quickly, withstand environmental stress, promote deeper root systems, encourage better blooms, and improve soil structure.

Lime products for correcting pH levels:

- **Espoma Organic Garden Lime** - an all natural plant supplement formulated to raise soil pH.
- **MAG-I-CAL®** - a highly soluble form of calcium that helps to rapidly raise soil's pH.

FERTILIZING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **For in-the-ground plantings** - fertilize every 3-5 weeks with a granular fertilizer or every 2-3 weeks with a liquid fertilizer.
- **Container plantings** - these need more frequent fertilizing, since the nutrients run through the drainage hole in the bottom of the pot when watered. Fertilize containers every 2-3 weeks with a granular or liquid fertilizer.
- **Raised bed planting** - fertilize every 4-5 weeks with a granular fertilizer or every 2-3 weeks with a liquid fertilizer.

WATERING:

Peppers need about one inch of water per week.

HOW TO WATER

- Water in the morning.
- Water roots not the leaves.
- Water deep and less often.
- Water less in cooler temps.
- Check your soil. The best tool is your finger. If the soil is dry from the tip of your finger to your first knuckle, it's time to water.

Wilting doesn't always mean your plant needs water. Sometimes plants wilt to protect themselves from the harsh heat of the sun. Be sure to check your soil using the finger test to determine if plants really need watering. And remember, mulching helps retain moisture.

continued on next page

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WHAT IS THE SCOVILLE SCALE?

The Scoville scale is a tool for measuring the spiciness or pungency of hot peppers. The scale measures the amount of capsaicin (the chemical compound that causes spicy heat) in a pepper and assigns it a number rating in Scoville Heat Units (SHUs). The higher the number, the hotter the pepper.

SWEET PEPPERS

Better Bell - green bell pepper. Great producer, easy to grow. Will mature to red when ripened. Perfect for beginners.

Big Bertha - big pepper that produces a lot of fruit. Premium variety.

Golden Bell - easy to grow and turns a nice yellowish, gold color.

Valencia Orange - easy to grow orange bell pepper. Sweet.

Orange Blaze - proven to do well and produces lots of fruit. Great disease resistance. Good for beginners.

Purple Beauty - leafy stem, slower growing.

Red Beauty - easy to grow red pepper.

Sweet Banana Supreme - longer in length pepper that is easy to grow and matures quickly.

Carmen - reddish pepper, very easy to grow. Similar to banana pepper, sweet.

Pepperoncini - great for pickling and good on pizza or other Italian dishes.

STAKING PEPPERS

Sweetie Pepper - great for containers. Small, easy to produce.

Yummy Snacking Pepper - nice tabletop pepper for a balcony or small space. Great growing project for kids.

MILD HOT PEPPERS

Mariachi - easy pepper that is mildly spicy and is great for snacking. Easy to grow. Turns red when mature.

Cubanelle - sweeter pepper with a slight kick.

Cajun Bell - not super hot but great flavor. Easy to grow.

Italian Roaster - great for grilling and in stuffing. Long pepper, gets spicier as it matures.

Poblano - nice in salsas or when you want some heat, but not too much.

Takara Shishito - most are sweet, but some are spicy. About 1 out of 10 have that heat. Fun to grow.

HOT PEPPERS

Aji Rico - new pepper. 1000-5000 units. Lots of sweetness.

Garden Salsa - similar to a jalapeno. 3000 units. Nice in salsas and dips. Smaller and produces a lot.

Jalapeno - 4000-5000 units. Popular, easy pepper. Nice in stir-fry.

continued on next page

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Hungarian Hot Wax - 5000-10000 units. Yellow in color, a bit of sweetness. Quick to mature.

Sriracha - 8000 units. Great in Asian dishes and fajitas.

Serrano - 10,000-23,000 units. Shorter pepper, easy to grow.

Cayenne - longer fruits, 6-7 inches. Can hang upside down and dry at the end of the season. 30,000-50,000 range.

Super Chili Peppers - 40,000-50,000 units. Longer pepper.

Thai Dragon- 50,000-100,000. Japanese variety and good for spicy stir-fry. Nice for containers.

Habanero - 100,000-150,000 units. Orange, blunt-nosed spicy pepper.

Caribbean Hot Red - 400,000 units. Stays smaller, easy in containers.

Jamaican Yelling Yellow - 400,000-500,000. Unique hot pepper, smaller.

Extreme Inferno- 1.3 million units. Similar to ghost pepper. Extremely spicy.

Trinidad Scorpion Pepper- take caution even touching the leaves. 2 million units.

Carolina Reaper - 2.2 million units. Hottest pepper right now. 3-4 feet high. Take caution.

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