

## PEPPER

Peppers are a close relative of the tomato; but, peppers are more cold sensitive than tomatoes and usually require more fertilization. Peppers are generally classified as sweet or hot, with the most common sweet peppers being large, blocky bell or mango varieties. Hot peppers vary in shape and size as well as degree of hotness. Peppers can be eaten either when the fruit is full sized but immature or



when it changes to its mature color. A variety of colors from green to red, yellow, orange, purple, white, and brown (dull purple) are available.

## Varieties

Green to red blocky bell types include Melody, Bell Boy, Jupiter, Lady Bell, Keystone Resistant Giant, and improved California Wonder varieties. Green to yellow varieties include Honeybell, Marengo, and Golden Bell. Gypsy and Canary are light yellow when immature but red when mature. Oriole turns bright orange when mature. Purple Bell and Purple Beauty turn purple at maturity. Other sweet peppers include Sweet Cherry, Pimento, Sweet Banana, and Italian frying types.

Hot peppers include: Jalapeno; Anaheim (used for chiles rellenos); El Paso; and Coronado. Tam Jal is a milder flavored jalapeno. Small hot types include: Serrano, Red Chili, and Super Chili. Small orange Habanero types are among the hottest peppers. Ornamental peppers vary in flavor and hotness and can be enjoyed as ornamental plants.

## When to plant

Peppers are usually set as transplants in the garden and should be planted 1-2 weeks after setting tomatoes. Peppers exposed to cold temperatures early in the season will often drop their fruit, resulting in a large unproductive plant. Mid-May is a safe time to plant peppers in most of central Kansas.

## Spacing

Set plants 18 inches to 2 feet apart in rows 15 inches apart. Hot peppers usually produce a larger, more sprawling plant and require more space.

## Care

Peppers thrive in well-drained fertile soil. Water is required in dry periods. Even, consistent watering is preferred as peppers can develop blossom end rot, a brown leathery patch at the base of the fruit. Peppers require a slightly more fertile spot than tomatoes, but gardeners should avoid over-fertilization. Harvest fruit when they are the desirable size, to keep the plants producing more. Poorly shaded fruit may be subject to sunburning in hot summer conditions.

## Harvesting

Carefully pick or cut peppers from the plants. Avoid pulling on the fruit as you can easily break the plant. Peppers that have begun to turn color usually will continue after harvest. Hot peppers produce an oil which will penetrate the skin and cause discomfort if you get it in your eyes or other sensitive areas of the body. Use rubber gloves to harvest very hot peppers. Sweet peppers can be chopped and frozen for later use; hot peppers can be frozen or dried. Store peppers for up to a week in a refrigerator.

## Common concerns

Aphids

Tobacco mosaic virus (distorted, misshapen leaves; transmitted by aphids)

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