

How to Grow Peppers



For October Farm to School Month:

The beginning of the school year is too late to start peppers. They take time! If you don't yet have pepper plants growing in the garden, we highly recommend procuring starts/seedlings to shave several weeks off the growing time. If you have pepper seeds, save some of those seeds for planting next Spring!



When to Grow

- Plant in Spring and harvest in Summer and Fall.
- From seed: Plant pepper seeds in seed trays for about 8 weeks before transplanting out to the garden. Transplant after the last frost in the Spring, when the weather has settled into consistent heat.
 - The [Farmer's Almanac](#) or your local UGA Cooperative Extension Agent can help you determine the approximate first and last frost dates in your area.
- Pepper plants are warm-loving and not cold-hardy. Cover/protect them during light frosts to extend the harvest in the Fall. Take them inside when it freezes or say goodbye.
 - To protect plants during freezes, cover them using agribon row covers, old bed sheets, blankets, or plastic sheets.



Where to Grow

- Full sun
- Fertile, well-draining soil (This could be a store-bought vegetable growing soil mix, or native soil mixed with compost. We recommend [Soil3](#) and [Dirtcraft Living Soils](#).)
- Avoid planting in the same spot where plants of the Solanaceae family were just growing (this includes tomato, eggplant, pepper, potato, petunia, and tobacco).



How to Plant

- Peppers should be transplanted rather than direct-seeded into the garden after the danger of frost has passed in the Spring/early Summer.
- To grow seedlings for transplant:
 - Plant seeds about ¼ inch deep, using a seed starting mix in seed trays or small pots/cups.
 - Water after seeding and maintain soil about as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
 - Seeds will have a hard time germinating (sprouting) in cold soil and will do best if the soil temperature stays a warm, steady 75-85 degrees F.
 - Plant extra seeds in each cell or cup in case germination is spotty.
- Once several true leaves have developed, transplant up to 3-4 inch pots; or if the threat of freezing temperatures has passed, go ahead and transplant them into the garden.
- In the garden, space pepper plants around 12-18 inches apart.



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Plant Care

- Try to transplant pepper seedlings into the garden before the plants become root bound in their pots. Transplant when the pepper seedlings have several sets of true leaves.
- After transplanting, place mulch around the base of the plants to suppress weeds and help retain soil moisture.
- Keep the area around your peppers weeded, and make sure your pepper plants receive a deep watering at least once/week.

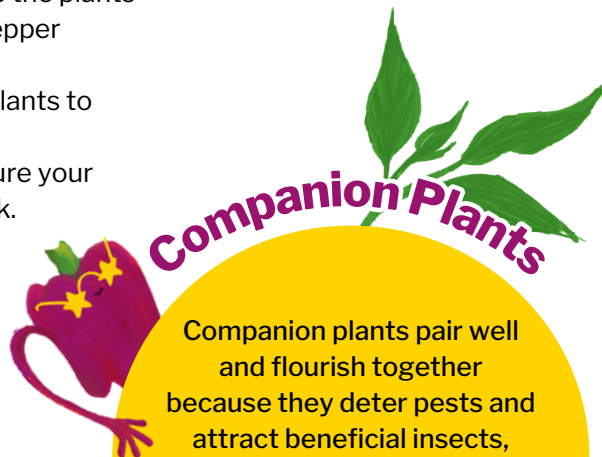
How to Harvest

Different peppers require different lengths of growing time. Refer to your seed packet for exact information on number of days to maturity.

- Peppers are fully ripe when they change from green to whatever color they're meant to turn (red, orange, yellow, purple, brown, etc.). However, you can of course harvest and enjoy peppers when they're still green, and there is an advantage to doing so--harvesting them at the green stage instead of waiting until they turn color encourages the plants to keep producing. When peppers mature to their fully ripe color, production slows down.
- Pepper plants tend to be brittle, so just be gentle when harvesting and don't twist and pull too hard. It's recommended (but not necessary) to cut the fruits from the stem with a knife or shears.

Tips

- Pepper plants like to “hold hands” with their neighbors, meaning that when they get to be full size plants, it's good for their leaves to touch the leaves of neighboring pepper plants. In other words, don't space them too far apart (or too close together)!
- If you're purchasing seedlings, select strong, stocky plants with dark green leaves.
- Phosphorus is an important soil nutrient for fruiting vegetables. If you have big, dark green, leafy plants, but no flowers or fruit, your soil might be lacking phosphorus. Bone meal, fish emulsion, compost, green manures, and animal manures are organic sources of phosphorus for soil amendment.
- Can you plant sweet peppers next to hot peppers? Yes! Planting hot and sweet peppers together will not impact the flavor of your current crop of peppers (it won't make your sweet peppers hot). However, they will likely cross-pollinate (meaning their flowers could be pollinated with pollen from each other's flowers), so if you're planning to save seed and don't want any genetic crossing, then don't plant them close together.



Companion plants pair well and flourish together because they deter pests and attract beneficial insects, creating conditions in which they both can thrive.

Basil and okra are good companion plants to peppers.

