

Capsicums and Chillies

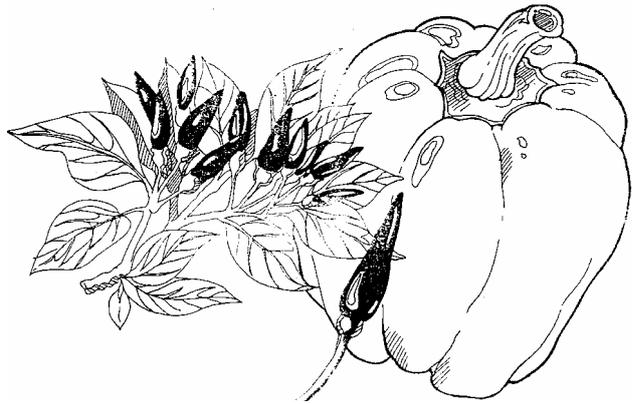
(Capsicum annum var. grossum, longum and acuminatum)

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VARIETIES

Yolo Wonder, most varieties do well.

Peppers (capsicums and chillies) can be grown all year round. Problems are often encountered in January/February with seedling production. Therefore it is advisable to establish plants for wet season production prior to January-February. Plant on ridges 30 cm or higher, if growing the crop during the wet season. Sow the seeds individually in pots or peat pellets to facilitate planting out. The seedlings should be ready for planting out at four to five weeks when they are about 10 cm high.



Seedlings should be hardened off for about 7-10 days before planting out. This is done by exposing seedlings to direct sunlight and at the same time reducing water to the plant gradually in amount and frequency. Always give seedlings a good soaking two to three hours before transplanting. Plant out on a cool overcast day or in the late afternoon. Plants are spaced 40-50 cm apart in rows 80 cm apart. After transplanting, a drench with a starter solution is beneficial. This can be a water solution of any of the water soluble fertiliser on the market, one with a high phosphate content being preferable. Short stakes, 1 m or so long, can be used to support the plants. These should be pushed about 30 cm into the ground (8 cm from each plant) at transplanting to avoid root damage.

FERTILISER

Liming the soil at 200-300 g/m² can be beneficial, allow at least four days between liming and adding any fertiliser. Peppers are gross feeders and 2 kg/m² or more of well rotted animal manure or compost should be dug into the seed bed prior to planting. A basic fertiliser rate of 70 g/m² of a complete fertiliser, containing medium amounts of nitrogen and potassium and high in phosphate, should be mixed in the rows. In addition a light side dressing of 20-30 g/plant of the same fertiliser should be applied every two to three weeks. This encourages the formation of thick flesh on the fruit and a sturdy plant on which large fruit may be supported.

WATERING

Regular thorough watering is advisable to keep the soil moist at all times. Stress due to lack of water causes flower drop. Wide fluctuation in soil moisture content can lead to "blossom-end rot".



HARVESTING

Capsicums can be picked as soon as they reach a reasonable size (about three months from transplanting) and can produce fruit for several months. Chillies can be picked at the mature green stage for salads and pickles and when fully ripe (red) for condiments and cooking. Chillies can be sun dried for storage. The faster they dry the better the keeping qualities.

PESTS

Aphids can be controlled by spraying with dimethoate when they appear, by following manufacturer's recommendations.

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