



# Easy Gardening

## PERS • PEPPERS • PEPPERS • PEPPERS • PEPPERS

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Peppers are a warm-season crop that will grow in most Texas areas. 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 do green peppers.

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

### Varieties

The best varieties of *sweet peppers* for growing in Texas include:

- Bell Tower
- Big Bertha
- California Wonder
- Gypsy
- Jupiter
- Yolo Wonder

Suitable *hot pepper* varieties include:

- Hidalgo Serrano
- Hungarian Wax
- Jalapeño

- Long Red Cayenne
- TAM Mild Jalapeño

### Site selection

Peppers grow in all types of soils but do best in heavier, well-drained soils. Plant them in areas that receive at least 6 hours of sunlight each day.

### Soil preparation

Several weeks before planting, work the soil 8 to 10 inches deep and rake it several times to break up the large clods. Work the soil only when it is dry enough not to stick to garden tools.

Incorporate large amounts of organic matter into the soil, especially if you are working with heavy clay. You can use compost, peat moss, rotted hay, or other organic matter.

### Planting

Because a few plants will feed most families, it is best to buy pepper plants rather

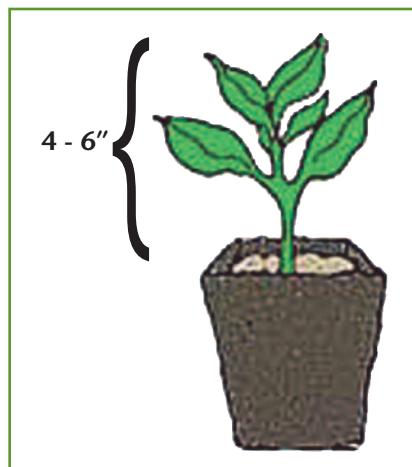
than grow them from seed. Buy healthy plants that are 4 to 6 inches tall (Fig. 1).

About three to four hot pepper plants and eight to ten sweet pepper plants usually are enough for a family of four.

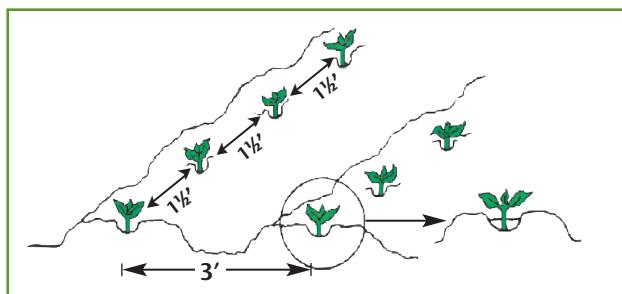
Peppers grow best in warm weather. Plant them only when all danger of cold

weather has passed. Plant fall peppers 12 to 16 weeks before the first expected frost.

Make the transplant holes 3 to 4 inches deep and about 1½ 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.



**Figure 1.** When buying pepper plants, choose those that are dark green and 4 to 6 inches tall.



**Figure 2.** Peppers should be planted at least 1½ feet apart in a slightly sunken area to retain water.

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

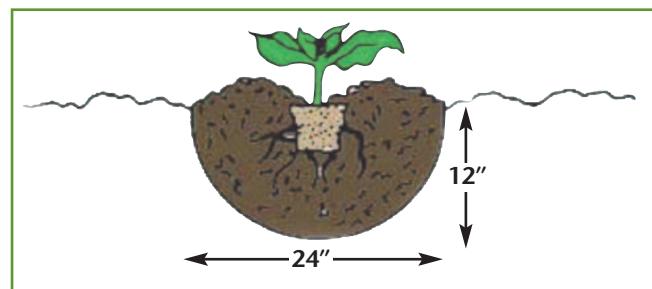
around each plant to hold water (Fig. 2). Water the plants after planting.

It is best to transplant peppers in the evening or on a cloudy day. This will keep the plants from drying too much and wilting.

## Fertilizing

Add 2 to 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 will plant single plants, place about 2 level tablespoons of fertilizer on the soil in the planting area. Mix it well with the soil (Fig. 3).



**Figure 3.** If you are planting single plants, work organic matter and 2 tablespoons of fertilizer into the planting area.

## Watering

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

## Care during the season

Hoe or till the soil lightly. Deep tilling will cut the pepper roots and slow growth. Pull by hand any weeds that 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 the plant after adding the fertilizer. This will increase the yield and the quality of the peppers.

Name and description	Control
 <b>Flea beetle</b>	$\frac{1}{16}$ inch long; metallic bronze, black-bronze, black, blue or green; jumps fast quickly; eats holes in leaves Sevin
 <b>Leaf miners</b>	Small, yellowish larvae inside the leaves; cause tunnels or trails on the leaves. Remove infected leaves Biological controls (Dacsure, Disureig-sure)
 <b>Aphid</b>	$\frac{1}{8}$ inch long; green, pink, red, brown; underside of leaves; sucks plant juices Insecticidal soap and neem oil.

## Insects

Many insecticides are available at garden centers for homeowner use. Sevin is a synthetic insecticide; organic options include sulfur and Bt-based insecticides. Sulfur also has fungicidal properties and helps control many diseases.

Before using a pesticide, read the label and always follow cautions, warnings, and directions.

## Diseases

Because diseases can be a problem on peppers, watch the plants closely. In mild weather, diseases start easily. Leaf spots are caused by fungi and bacteria and can be treated with neem oil, sulfur, or other fungicides. Again, always follow label directions.

## Harvesting

If you pick the peppers as they mature, the yields will be greater. The first peppers should be ready 8 to 10 weeks after transplanting.

Pick bell peppers when they become shiny, firm, and dark green. If 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. Jalapeños are mature when they reach good size and develop a deep, dark green sheen.

## Storing

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

### Acknowledgments

This publication was revised from earlier versions written by Sam Cotner, Professor Emeritus and former Extension Horticulturist and Jerry Parsons; former Professor and Extension Horticulturist.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Edward G. Smith, Director, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, The Texas A&M System.

Revision