How to grow peppers

Pepper (Capsicum annum)
Family: Solanaceae (Nightshade)
Season: Warm
Ease of growing: Moderate
Nutrient needs: Medium
Water needs: Medium-high
Common propagation: Transplants

Seed facts
Germination temperatures: 60°F to 95°F
Germination time: 7 to 28 days
Viability: 2 to 4 years

Transplants
Weeks to grow transplant: 6 to 8
Start: April-May
Plant out: late May to June

Planning facts
Spacing: 12” to 18” in 24” to 36” rows
Plants per square foot: 1/2 to 3/4
Days to harvest: 50 to 70 from transplanting

Variety selection
Peppers are a spicy addition to the backyard garden. The commonly grown bell pepper is large, mild flavored and sweet, but there are an incredible diversity of peppers with other colors, shapes and degrees of heat. The spiciness of peppers is measured by Scoville heat units, which increase with the level of a chemical called capsaicin that’s responsible for their heat. Some well-known hot peppers and their Scoville units are as follows: Anaheim (1,000), Jalapeno (4,000), Tabasco (40,000), and Habanero (300,000). The hottest pepper in the world is known as “bhut jolokia” and has a Scoville rating of over one million!

Preparation and planting
Well-drained soils with abundant phosphorous are preferred. High calcium levels are also helpful for avoiding blossom end-rot. Transplants with flower buds, but no flowers are ideal.

Care
Though peppers are not difficult to grow, yield is easily reduced by very cool temperatures (55°F or less) or very hot weather (90°F). Adverse temperatures and low humidity will cause blossom drop. Peppers need a constant and even moisture supply during blossoming and fruiting. Avoid overhead irrigation to prevent disease development. Pepper growth can also be accelerated with use of black plastic mulches. In windy, exposed areas, support peppers with stakes to avoid broken stems. Like tomatoes, peppers will not tolerate frost.

Major pests
Insects: Flea beetles, cutworms, aphids, European corn borer, Colorado potato beetle, whiteflies.
Diseases: Phytophthora, Septoria leaf spot, early and late blight, anthracnose, Fusarium and Verticillium wilts, bacterial spot, tobacco mosaic virus.

Harvesting and storage
Harvest peppers in their green immature state or allow them to develop their red, yellow or orange color. Cut the pods rather than pull them from the vines to avoid disturbing the roots. Use peppers fresh, dried whole or crushed, and frozen. Once picked, peppers are sensitive to chilling injury and should not be stored at temperatures below 50°F.

www.migarden.msu.edu

Developed by James Manning, Undergraduate Research Assistant, and Daniel Brainard, Vegetable Extension Specialist; MSU Department of Horticulture; Gary Heilig, MSU Extension educator.

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer. Committed to achieving excellence through a diverse workforce and inclusive culture that encourages all people to reach their full potential. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jeffrey W. Dwyer, Interim Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned.

WCAG 2.0 AA