

Growing peppers

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I started growing Chilli peppers a couple of years before I joined the National Vegetable Society in 2013 as one of the founder members of the West Midlands D.A. At first I achieved moderate success with a free packet of Cayenne pepper seeds which came with a gardening magazine purchased by my daughter. The success came in the form of Wendy my wife enjoying the small Chilli peppers she used for a curry, which turned out to be very hot. I then went on to grow more and more peppers, both the Sweet (bell peppers) and Chilli peppers.

I first sowed my seeds into a small 3.5 inch black shallow pot using seed compost which had both been warmed and placed in a saucer of water in my propagator, and then covered thinly in vermiculite. The seeds of both types of peppers normally take between 7-10 days to germinate if kept at between 20°C and 25°C. I then allow them to reach a height of between 3 and 4 inches before transplanting them. I then separate each seedling and plant in a 3.5 inch deeper pot in a mixture of multipurpose compost and worm cast soil.

I began to notice that the seedlings,

although still in the propagator, did not show much improvement in size for 2-3 weeks. I put this down to the belief that they do not like so much root disturbance. I generally sow the sweet peppers at the end of January as they need a long growing season in order to have mature peppers by the end of August. I then sow my chilli peppers around the end of February as they do not need such a long time before reaching maturity.

In order to not cause so much root disturbance I began to sow individual seeds in a plug plant pot using the methods already mentioned. This meant the young seedlings did not have so much root disturbance as before. I took my deeper 3.5 inch pot and made a depression in the centre of the compost large enough to take the contents of the plug pot and then transplanted the seedling into the larger pot. The sweet peppers are by this time growing quite well and require between 1-2 inches of water each week and as soon as the roots appear out of the base of the pot they will require repotting into a pot of between 1-1.5 inches larger. At this stage they may begin to show



Pepper 'Sweet Bonita'



Pepper 'Kilian'



Pepper 'Apple Crisp'



Pepper 'Lemonella'

signs of flowering so to help the plants set the flowers I add a little seaweed extract to the water.

These plants will require further potting into larger pots between every 2-3 weeks until they are in 2 litre pots. They will require supporting by stakes as once the peppers start swelling they will become quite heavy. The chilli pepper plants on the other hand will not require so much repotting as a 5-6 inch pot will be sufficient to grow the plants into maturity and they will not require so

much water. They will require to be kept in heat of between 25°C and 30°C.

Both types of peppers will show green peppers to start with and the sweet peppers can be eaten at that stage in salads or stir fries or allowed to ripen to red when they will taste much sweeter. You can also find them in yellow, orange and white colours so you can have quite a range. The chilli peppers are best eaten when they ripen and can be found in colours ranging from an almost white colour to dark mauve and a Russian variety is almost black.

The sweet peppers can be kept in the cool for 3-4 weeks or sliced once the centre calyx holding the seeds have been removed and kept in the freezer. The chilli peppers can be stored in airtight jars in olive oil or dried and turned into chilli powder. They need to be dried for at least 3 days and then ground up in a household blender and stored in jam jars until needed. The major problem with chilli peppers is that their heat varies from 50000 Joules on the Scoville scale to over 2.2 million. Therefore it is best to handle the peppers with a pair of rubber gloves on as the moisture in the pepper once on your skin can cause burns and the very hot chillies can cause third degree burns. The very hot chilli varieties such as Bhutta Jolkia and Carolina Reaper on no account should be eaten raw and should only be eaten after cooking.

I have now got to the stage of growing between 20-30 varieties, several sweet peppers and many more chillies. If anyone requires any more information please contact me on e-mail graham.brickstock@outlook.com I also have some seeds for sale if anyone is interested.

I hope members would find this article of interest.