

Growing Chillies from Seed: Part 1



What time of year is best?

In the UK, March and April are the best months to get going with chilli seeds – this should then mean you are picking fruit from July onwards. Some chilli varieties are also suited to being sown later in the year, for example, varieties with fruits that are typically eaten 'green' or immature, and for varieties that ripen very quickly. Because chillies need warmth to germinate and grow, later sowings have been known to do better than an earlier sowing because there is less risk of their growth being checked by a period of cold weather.

What temperatures are needed?

Chilli seeds need warmth to germinate - 25°C is about ideal for the highest percentage of germination. Chilli seeds are unlikely to germinate below 10°C, and they will germinate most quickly when the compost is about 35°C. Once germinated, a soil temperature around 20°C is ideal. Germinating indoors during the Spring will make life easier.

What equipment will you need?

Since chillies do like to be warm, some sort warming equipment is helpful to keep an even temperature:

- Free draining compost
- 3" pots and 6" pots
- A dibber is useful for pricking-out seedlings
- Plant labels
- Warming mat or heated propagator (no essential, but very useful)
- Liquid feed

What to do?

For each variety of chilli you want to grow, fill a 3" pot with good quality, free draining compost – to within 2cm of the top of the pot. Lightly firm the compost down, then sow the seeds evenly on the compost - we tend to sow thickly – then lightly dust some compost on top of the seeds – just a few millimetres (if you have some vermiculite, that can be used to cover the seeds instead). Stand the pots in a deep saucer of warm water until you see signs of water on the surface, then let the pot drain a little.

Keep the seeded pots warm (above 10C, ideally 25C) and inspect daily. Keep the surface of the compost moist. Once the seedlings start to emerge, find a bright position for them.

What varieties are good to start with?

We have found the following varieties to be very reliable and productive:

- **Cherry Bomb** – Very attractive fruits, first to ripen each year. Good for salsa and stuffing.
- **Ring of Fire** – A Cayenne variety. Prolific, good for cooking. Can be used green or red and dries very well.
- **Padron** – Very popular tapas chilli. Prolific, picked immature and lightly fried. Delicious!
- **Aji Limon** – A hot Peruvian chilli with fruits that ripen green to yellow. Very easy to grow and does not need support. Chillies have a lemon flavour and are good for salsas and cooking.

What next?

In part two will look at pricking out the seedlings and potting on.

Good luck, Steve.

SDCF