



Growing chillies from seed.

Customer FAQs for growing chilli plants from seed

Selecting varieties to grow

Q: What variety of chilli plant should I grow?

A: We are often asked this, and we start by asking how you will use the chillies.

- Pot plant chillies for a windowsill? We have plenty to choose from in this category, some of the best being Thai Hot, Pretty Purple and Apache.
- Medium-Hot for Salsa, pickling, mild sauces and stuffing? Some great varieties in this category are – Santa Fe Grande, Jalapeno and Cherry Bomb.
- Mild chillies for stuffing? Poblano and Anaheim are great for Mexican stuffed chilli recipes.
- Hot and Very hot chillies for cooking? Any of the Habaneros, Ring of Fire and Aji Limon are all great for cooking hot dishes – for extremely hot – the Bhut Jolokia.
- Plants for the patio? We recommend a plant with smaller fruits or pliable stems to prevent too much damage from rough weather. Twilight, Aji Limon and Firecracker are good choices. You can grow other varieties, but they may need some support from canes.
- What chilli plants are best for hanging baskets? At the farm, we plant hanging baskets for Summer display with the following varieties: Super, Apache, Thai Hot, Firecracker, Pretty Purple and Purple Tiger.

See our seed collection here: <https://www.southdevonchillifarm.co.uk/online-shop/chilli-seeds/>

Our seedlings and pots plants are here: <https://www.southdevonchillifarm.co.uk/online-shop/chilli-plants-and-seedlings/>

Germination

Q: What is the best time of year to start sowing in the UK?

A: March usually works out best for sowing. You can sow earlier, but you may need a heated propagator.

Here are some guides on our web page to get you off to a great start:

<https://www.southdevonchillifarm.co.uk/how-to.../growing-chilli-plants/>

<https://www.southdevonchillifarm.co.uk/how-to.../our-blog/>

Q: I have followed your tips, but my seeds have not germinated. What went wrong?

A: The links above to the tips on growing from seed may help. Chilli seeds need a steady temperature of 25c to 28c (30c being ideal) to germinate and they also need a good quality seed compost - fine material, good drainage and not too high in nitrogen. The seeds should also be kept moist (if they are allowed to dry out, germination can be erratic), but not too wet. If the growing conditions are not ideal, they may take a long time to germinate – they can still germinate up to a month after sowing. At the farm, we sow into Vermiculite (<https://www.southdevonchillifarm.co.uk/online-shop/chilli-growing-equipment/vermiculite-small-10ltrs/>) with the seeds about 3mm-5mm below the surface. We water well from the base until the moisture appears on the surface, then move the seed pot/tray to a heated propagator. From sowing, we surface water with a dilute solution of Chilli Focus in a fine spray (<https://www.southdevonchillifarm.co.uk/online-shop/chilli-growing-equipment/chill-focus-plant-food/>). In these conditions, we expect most of the seed to germinate within two weeks, but a few varieties take longer.

[Seedling problems](#)

Q: My seedlings are leggy; what should I do?

A: If you can move them to a brighter spot, that will help. You can also move the seedlings apart from each other to provide more all-round light. If you still have leggy plants when you decide to pot-on, chilli plants are quite happy to be replanted to a new soil level, so you can bury part of the stem to stabilise the plant then. This should be less of a problem if they start to get better light and are not too crowded. Chilli plants that want to be big (like Padron peppers) will need better light than small plants (like Prairie Fire), so if you only have a small area with good light, use that area for your larger plants.

Q: When using your plugs, how should I sow them and pot them on?

A: At the farm, when we sow into plugs, we usually sow two seeds per plug and pick-out the weaker seedlings to leave just one per plug. Once the seedling in the plug has three or four true sets of leaves, we pot-on into a 1ltr (about 6") pot.

Q: My chilli plants are not growing well, what could be wrong?

A: The three main causes are: Temperature – Chilli plants will grow very slowly or not at all in cold conditions. Try to keep the soil around 20c as an optimal.

Watering – too much water or compost that is too airless will retard growth.

Pests: Aphids and other pests can be a problem. Inspect plants regularly and remove any pests. Poor Compost – Chilli plants like a free draining, rich compost with a pH of 6 to 6.5. Over or under feeding – follow the manufacturer's directions for dilution and frequency of feeding.

Potting on and Pot Size

Q: What pot sizes should I use for chilli plants?

A: We recommend using a 3" (7.5cm) pot for the first transplant, and then using progressively larger pots as the plant develops. Our experience is that the plants do better with a fairly gradual size increase, rather than potting on into a pot that is much larger than the plant needs, for example: 3", 6", 9", and 12". The final pot size will depend on the growing conditions, the variety of chilli and where the plant is being grown.

Q: What compost should I use?

A: There are several brands available in garden centres for a compost made to the John Innes #2 formula. This is a soil-based compost with good drainage, suitable pH and a good level of nutrients. Soil-based composts are also easy to re-wet when dry, and are still heavy when dry (which avoids problems with pots blowing over or being knocked over).

Watering and Feeding

Q: What should I feed my plants and how often?

A: We recommend Chilli Focus, available from our web page in three sizes. A weak solution should be used initially (see bottle for guidelines), building up as the plant matures. A weekly feed is usually sufficient, depending on the richness of the compost, and how often you re-pot.

Q: What type of plant food do chillies like?

A: The best approach is to use a reasonably balanced feed, but one that has a good quantity of potash (potassium) to encourage flowering and fruiting. We sell a feed called Chilli Focus which is formulated for chilli plants.

Q: Can I use an automatic watering system?

A: Yes, you can. We recommend that the compost should contain a significant amount of drainage matter, such as perlite (<https://www.southdevonchillifarm.co.uk/online-shop/chilli-growing-equipment/perlite-small-10ltrs/>) to help keep air around the roots. You can make a simple auto-watering system by placing pots on a platform over a water tray. Feed a thin strip of capillary matting into the pot from the base and trail into the water tray.

Q: How often should I water my plants?

A: Chilli plants enjoy a good watering followed by a period without water – until the compost is almost dry. Select a compost with good drainage to help keep air in the soil and try to avoid the pot standing in water. If the underside of leaves develop oedema (white ‘fluff’ or crystals), that is a sign that the water has too much water at the roots.

Q: Should I water from the top or the base?

A: If you can, water from the base. This will reduce the likelihood of algae developing on the compost surface, which can reduce the air and nutrients from

liquid feeding that are available to the plant. Avoid the plant sitting in water for long periods of time as this will damage the lower roots.

Growing outdoors (e.g. in a pot on a patio)

Q: Can I grow chilli plants in a pot outside on a patio?

A: Yes, you can as long as there is no risk of frost. Here are a few tips to get the best from outdoor chilli plants:

1. Go big on the drainage in the compost/raised bed to prevent the roots being waterlogged.
2. Use black pots – they help to keep the compost warm.
3. Use rain guards around the plant base to deflect heavy rain.
4. Consider bringing the pots indoors during bad weather.
5. Use soil-based compost (heavy, so less likely to blow over) John Innes No.2 is a good choice.
6. Select small/light fruited varieties (less likely to get damaged in bad weather).
7. Pick the fruits green to maximise the crop – expect a lower yield compared to greenhouse growing.
8. Support the plant with canes and place in a warm, sheltered spot.
9. If planting in a border, wait until the soil is about 18c and ensure the bed has good drainage.

Growing hydroponically and under artificial lighting

Q: Do chillies grow well under artificial lights?

A: Although we don't currently use artificial light at the farm, we have heard from customers that chillies grow very well to these growing systems. As they are light-hungry plants, stronger lighting systems would work best.

Q: Can I grow chillies hydroponically?

A: Yes, we have experimented with this at the farm using aerated 'water-bath' feeding/growing systems, and it works very well. Plants can also be grown in inert material with drip-fed water and nutrients. All the chillies grown by South Devon Chilli Farm are grown in the soil and in polytunnels. If you don't have access to a garden, hydroponics is an alternative when you are looking to grow a good crop of chillies, particularly when growing some of the larger varieties.

Flowering and Fruiting

Q: Does it help to hand-pollinate?

A: Chillies have 'perfect flowers' meaning they don't need help from another plant or pollinating insects to set fruits. In our crop tunnels, we don't hand pollinate, but there is some pollination care of bees and hoverflies in the polytunnels. The vast majority of our crop will be from self-pollinated flowers. Chilli plants usually produce an abundance of flowers – more than they need or could sustain if they all turned to fruits. There is some evidence that fruits produced from cross pollination tend to be larger and contain more seeds, so it would be worth trying some hand pollination for the fruits that you want to be bigger. To hand pollinate, use a fine art brush.

Q: I am having problems with fruit yield; how do I improve the flower set and cropping?

A: The steps below will help to encourage the production of flowers and the set of fruits on chilli plants. If you have flowers on the plant, but they are falling off; or you have very few flowers; one of these tips should fix the problem:

- Warm night-time temperature (comfortably over 15c)
- Avoiding periods of extreme heat in the day. Over 40c will cause flowers to abort and drop. 25c is ideal
- Too much nitrogen can cause the plant to forget to flower
- Too little potash can cause set flowers to abort and drop (try our Chilli Focus feed).
- Soil too wet or too high winds

Q: How long before I can pick fruit?

A: From sowing, chilli plants vary from about 80 to 120 days to fruit being ready. If you are using the unripe (green) fruit, this range will be reduced. Our seed

packets have information on typical fruiting times. This information is repeated on our web page in the seed section.

Picking

Q: When should I pick the fruit on my plant?

A: To keep a plant busy, pick the fruits as soon as they are the size and colour you want.

We pick a lot of fully-grown green chillies such as Ring of Fire, Jalapeno, Poblano and Hungarian Hot Wax. These varieties are traditionally used green/unripe. Once the fruits are picked, the plant will form new flowers and mature smaller fruits.

If you are looking to cook with fresh or dried brightly coloured chillies, pick the fruits as soon as they reach the ripe colour to maximise crop weight.

Q: My fruits have black marks on, is that a problem?

A: As long as the fruits are firm, the black is just an early sign of ripening. There are a few chillies that we get asked about concerning blackening – Jalapeno very often has black streaks before ripening. We sometime get the same question concerning the plants which can develop black marks around the divisions in the stems, which is very common and not a problem.

Q: My chillies are not ripening. What can I do?

A: We recommend leaving the fruits on the plant to ripen. Place the plant in a location where it will enjoy as much sunlight as possible.

Q: Are any chillies ripe when green?

A: No, they all turn to one of the following colours as they ripen: Red, Orange, Yellow, Brown or white. Some varieties go through a several colours as they ripen, and some develop 'black' marks prior to ripening. Ripening tends to accelerate towards the end of the growing season.

[Pests and diseases](#)

Q: How do I control Spider Mites and Thrips?

A: Spider mites and Thrips can be a problem during periods of hot, dry weather. These conditions will greatly increase the lifecycle of these pests, allowing them to get to such large numbers that they can harm the plant. The signs of Spider mite infestation are very fine web on the under-side of the leaves, and 'windows' that can be seen from the top of the leaves. Thrips suck the sap from the leaves, causing them to turn yellow/silver and fall off.

Spider Mites and Thrips can be controlled by regular spray or water on the under-side of the leaves, or by using a non-toxic spray, like the SB Invigorator we sell online:

<https://www.southdevonchillifarm.co.uk/online-shop/chilli-growing-equipment/sb-plant-invigorator-aphid-spray/>

You can also consider cutting off heavily infested section of the plant to stop the spread.

Q: How do I control aphids (Green fly and Black fly)

A: If you look on the under-side of the leaves, you may spot greenfly (aphids) during the Summer months. The easiest way to clear the plant is to take it outside (or away from its normal growing area); tip the plant so you can see the under-side of the leaves, and gently brush them off. Smaller ones may need to be squished. If you repeat this for a few days, that should bring it back under control. For extreme cases, we sell a non-toxic spray and feed:

<https://www.southdevonchillifarm.co.uk/online-shop/chilli-growing-equipment/sb-plant-invigorator-aphid-spray/>

White-looking 'flies' on the top of the leaves are probably the shed skins of aphids, and will wash off with a hand-sprayer.

Q: My plant has yellow leaves. What's wrong with it?

A: Yellow leaves on chilli plants can indicate a host of different problems or a combination of them. The usual causes and cures are listed below:

- Poor drainage. If the plant is in very wet soil, it will not be able to take up nutrients from the soil. Re-pot into good quality, free-draining compost and allow to dry out. Avoid leaving the plant sitting in water.
- Poor soil or feed. Compost or feed low in essential nutrients (in particular, Nitrogen) can cause leaves to look pale. Re-pot into good quality compost or try a new feed.
- Pest attack. Inspect the plant carefully for pests – especially on the underside of leaves. Use the recommended treatment (see above) and feed the plant to help it recover.
- Viruses and bacteria. Plants that have been attacked by a pest can sometime succumb to a virus. If the pests are removed and the affected leaves removed, the plant can sometimes be saved.

Pruning and training

Q: Do I need to prune my chilli plants to get a good crop?

A: We don't prune our crop plants at the farm. We do sometime pick off set fruit on small Hungarian Wax plants as they can sometime get a little preoccupied with developing the first fruit that sets, but this doesn't happen very often. Pruning to re-shape a plant may be needed if it has grown a little too much towards a bright window, or to remove dead growth while over wintering a plant. As long as you provide good spacing and good light, chilli plants usually develop into a natural bush shape.

Q: Can I train my chilli plants like tomatoes?

A: If you wanted to train the plants into a more vertical shape, then pruning out the side shoots would be necessary. This is a technique used by large greenhouse pepper growers to maximize the area under glass.

Over-wintering

Q: I would like to keep my plant over winter, what should I do?

A: Chilli plants tend to stop growing and flowering during the winter months in the UK. If the plant is coming in from a greenhouse or patio, you may need to prune it to fit the available space. You can lightly prune to re-shape the plant or heavily prune to just leave the main stem. If the plant grew to an ideal size, then

a hard pruning will allow it to re-grow with the same fruit cover and size the following season. Keep the compost just off dry while the plant is dormant and keep it somewhere light, but not with extremes of temperature. In the UK, overwintered plants usually start to become active in March or April, depending on where they are being kept. Fresh compost in the Spring will help to get them going.

Preserving Chillies

Q: How do I dry the chillies I have grown?

A: Drying chillies is more about air circulation than heat, so place them in a well-aired basket and put them somewhere warm – such as over a radiator. Spread the chillies in a thin layer and leave the stalk attached. They should dry out in a few days. Chillies with thick flesh (like Jalapenos) are not a good choice for drying. A thin-fleshed chilli, like Ring-of-Fire is an easy chilli to dry. Once dry, store in an airtight container, and keep out of direct sunlight to preserve the colour and flavour.

Q: Can I freeze chillies?

A: Yes, they freeze very well. They don't lose any heat and are easier to chop finely when frozen. To save space in your freezer, chop chillies (by hand or in a food processor) before freezing and store in thin slabs or ice-cube trays.

Q: How do I pickle chillies?

A: We have a recipe on our web page that works very well -

<https://www.southdevonchillifarm.co.uk/how-to.../recipes/chilli-pickling-recipe/>

Saving Seed

Q: I would like to collect and save seed for next season, do you have any tips?

A: The ideal time to pick a chilli to be used for seed stock is just as it reaches its ripe colour. Cut the fruit open and with a blunt instrument, scrape the seeds out onto paper. Place the seeds in a warm spot out of direct sunlight until they dry a little – this will prevent them developing mould. Store wrapped in foil and place the foil wrapper in a tin or glass jar and lid. Store the jar/tin in a cool place (eg. in a cupboard). The fridge is good if you want to keep the seed for several years,

but they should be fine for a couple of years if they are dried a little before storing.