

Growing Chillies from Seed and Chilli Plant Care Advice

Germinating Chilli Seeds

The best time to sow seeds is between February and May, the earlier the better for very hot varieties; you can sow seeds later than this but the fruits may not ripen. The compost needs to be between 20°C and 35°C with 30°C being ideal; a warming tray or heated propagator will help. Plant the seeds in moist (not wet) seed compost at a depth of 2 to 5mm. To keep an even temperature, it is best not to expose the seed compost to direct sunlight. If conditions are ideal, the first seeds should appear within 7 - 14 days. Once most of the seeds have germinated, move the seedlings to a sunny spot - ideally in a heated greenhouse for best light. Take care not to let the compost dry out or become too wet.

Pricking-out

Once the seedlings have produced true leaves (pointed leaves), each seedling can be transplanted into its own pot (a 7.5cm pot is ideal). Take care not to damage the seedlings - holding only by a leaf is best and using a blunt 'dibber' to separate one seedling from the other. Use any free-draining compost, we recommend soil-based because it can be easily re-wet when dry. Keep the compost above 18°C and ideally at 20°C for rapid growth.

Potting On

For plants that will be matured in pots, pot-on as they out-grow the pot. For small varieties, a 13cm (1Ltr) pot may be fine as a final size; for larger plants, a 22 - 30cm (5 - 10Ltr) will be better. Pots can be left outside once the risk of frost has passed, but they will do better if kept in a greenhouse or indoors overnight. Plants that will be kept outside will benefit from hardening-off.

Fruit Setting, Feeding, Watering and Pests

Try to keep the plants above 17°C and below 36°C (25°C being ideal) to promote fruit-setting; if the plants are exposed to temperatures outside this range, you may experience blossom-drop. Feeding your plants will help fruit development. If feeding with Chilli Focus (available on our website), see the instructions on the bottle. Water plants when dry but avoid over-watering and do not allow pots to sit in excess water. For advice on pests such as aphids, see the "How To...Growing.." section at: www.sdcf.co.uk

Picking

The chillies can be picked at any stage and will be milder when immature. Picking fruits as soon as they are ready will encourage more fruit setting. If you want chillies for drying, they look more attractive if left to ripen first. For plants that produce a heavy crop, such as Jalapeno, feeding with a high-potash feed (such as 'Chilli Focus') will be needed to encourage a succession of fruits.

Overwintering

Most chilli plants can be treated as perennial house plants, but may need some pruning in the winter. Smaller varieties are best for overwintering and for house plants, for example: Apache, Twilight, Prairie Fire and Super.

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