

SWEET PEPPER

Capsicum annuum

Solanaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Description

Varieties of *Capsicum* are recorded as being a cultivated crop of Bolivia and Central America for thousands of years. Sweet peppers are a non-pungent variety which contain a recessive gene which has diminished the capsaicin alkaloid, the substance which makes the chile pepper taste "hot". In addition to green, some pods can ripen to shades of red, orange, yellow, purple and brown. There are 2,000 varieties in this species of pepper which are eaten fresh or in cooked dishes.

Common Names

- Spanish
 - Pimentón
 - Pimiento
 - Pimiento Marrón

Cultivation

Because of their tropical origin, peppers need a long growing season to develop best flavor, during which air temperature, nutrients and moisture are very important. Sweet peppers require more nutrients and water than chile peppers. Seeds are started inside or in a temperature-controlled area 10-12 weeks before soil temperatures reach 18° C (60° F). Seedlings must be gradually moved to the outdoors, then planted in holes 4-6 in (10-15 cm) deep with 2-3 nodes below the soil line. Optimum day temperature is 21° - 24° C (70° - 76° F). Day temperature can exceed 30° C (86° F) as long as nights are within 21° - 24° C (70° - 76° F). Roots can extend 2-3 ft out from the plant but are shallow. The crop responds well to being planted in raised beds, mulched with leaves or compost, use of a green manure cover crop, furrow or drip irrigation. Nitrogen and water early in the growth stage are critical for developing sufficient leaf mass to shade fruit from sunburn later in the hot season. Phosphorus from bone meal will help to insure good fruiting.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Mature fruits should be cut from the plant when they are firm and glossy. Depending on the variety, the true color of the mature fruit should be achieved before harvest. Fully mature, colored peppers (yellow, red, brown, orange, purple) are crisp and juicy. Sweet peppers have more vitamin A and C and higher sugar content than at the green stage, particularly as cool weather approaches. Seeds to be saved should come from fresh, fully mature fruit. The seed can be separated from the flesh either by hand or by grinding and washing. Rinsing the seeds with a mild vinegar or bleach solution will discourage some pest-borne diseases. The seeds should be dried quickly in moving air, stored at a temperature below 40° C (104° F), at the lowest humidity possible. In closed containers, pepper seeds can be viable for 1-2 years.

Pests and Diseases

Pests and diseases do not seriously affect pepper crops as long as they are rotated yearly and not planted following other Solanaceae family crops (potatoes, tomatoes). Varieties resistant to the tomato, tobacco viruses, bacterial spot and anthracnose should be planted whenever available.

Cooking and Nutrition

Peppers are eaten fresh, pickled, roasted, dried and used in tomato sauce and salsa. All varieties are good sources of vitamin A and C.

References

Missouri Botanical Garden. <http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?taxonid=287148&isprofile=0&>