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Start: Seeds or seedlings

Germination: 7 to 25 days, 20°C to 35°C

Seed Life (viability): 3-4 years

Soil: Well drained

Sunlight: Full sun

Sow Seeds: 45 - 60 cm apart

Thin to: 45 - 60 cm apart

Ave. Days to Harvest: 65 to 100

Good Companions: Basil, Carrots, Chives, Garlic, Leeks, Marjoram, Onion, Oregano, Tomatoes, Yarrow

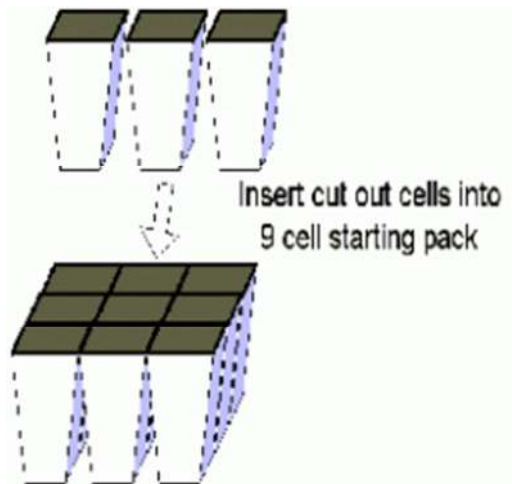
Bad Companions: Fennel, Kohlrabi

Germination

Some peppers (Bird and other small wild peppers) require extreme measures like bleaching or feeding to birds to get them to germinate. Luckily most peppers will germinate fine without such measures. Sow the seed 1/2cm deep in a well-drained starting medium. Seeds require a warm environment to germinate; your growing medium should be between 20 - 35 degrees C with 30C being the ideal. Using a heat mat (available at home and garden stores, hardware stores and even pet shops) can help to ensure ideal conditions. Additionally, young starts will fare much better with additional light. Place in a window or sunny location that receives lots of sun exposure. Consider supplementing with artificial lighting if possible.

My method is to setup a warming tray using a few off the shelf components.

- Heating Pad
- Plastic tray
- 3×3 plastic seed starting packs
- Saran wrap



First, prepare the starter packs by cutting 8 of the 9 cell packs into individual cell carriers. Fill each 1 cell with a high quality seed starting mix and insert the single cells into the 9 cell starting packs. The individual cell in the 9 cell carrier allows individual movement of seedlings to grow lights. Place between 2 & 3 seeds in each cell (or other quantity based on predicted germination ratio). Insert seeded cells into 9 cell groups and arrange in plastic tray. When the tray is full, cover and set it over the heating pad. Set the heating pad off at the highest setting and monitor the temperature with digital thermometer. Optimum soil temperature is 85 degrees F, adjust accordingly to maintain this temperature.



Lighting

Adjacent to the germination trays overhead fluorescent grow light setup. When a seed germinates, move it out off of the heat pads and under the lights as soon as it breaks ground. It is crucial to grow a healthy plant so cull anything less than perfect. Also, be sure to label plants well as it is easy to get mixed up when you have several different types of pepper in each 9 pack. Print labels on transparent envelope labels (Avery #2660) and cut/stick them on plastic stakes.

Outside

Set plants out 2 to 3 weeks after the last frost when the soil has warmed and the weather has settled. Peppers can be temperamental when it comes to setting fruit if temperatures are too hot or too cool. Nighttime temperatures below 15C or above 23C can reduce fruit set.

Tip: Wait until soil temperatures exceed 10 degrees C at all times before placing into the ground. Pepper plants can be fairly close to one another, so that there is slight contact between plants. For at least a few weeks, bring them indoors at night. After 2 to 3 weeks of this routine, leave them outside.

Transplanting

Between April and June, most peppers will need to be transplanted into larger containers. Sterilize and reuse plastic containers of varying sizes for all plants. I don't have any specific guidelines for when to transplant. When the plant looks small for it's pot, it's time to move. Use regular potting soil available almost anywhere. Be sure to keep the plants well hydrated. Also it is best to transplant when it is not excessively hot, this lessens the impact of transplant shock. Fertilize after a week.

Growing

Peppers need a steady supply of water for best performance but be careful not to overwater. A well drained soil will prevent waterlogging. If fertilizing, be careful not to overdo it on nitrogen as this will give you nice lush and leafy plants but will deter fruit growth. Organic fertilizers and soil should be rich in phosphorus, potassium and calcium.

Mulching with black plastic or similar material is a good way to maintain heat and soil moisture. Additionally, floating row covers over your beds can help to protect against cold early in the growing season. Use caution with row covers not to overheat plants and cause them to drop their blossoms.

Tip: Stake tall varieties for earlier and heavier harvest.

In the Garden

By May, most peppers can move out of to enjoy natural unfiltered sunlight. Plant baccatum peppers in the ground between 1-2 feet apart. It is recommend planting in containers the first year but if you must plant in the ground, give them at least 2

feet from neighbors and consider how you will add a trellis later. If the weather is slow to warm, it is helpful to cover the ground around the seedlings with plastic wrap. This helps elevate the soil temperature. It is also sometimes helpful to cover plants with mini greenhouses. To do this, cut the neck off of clear plastic 2 liter (or larger) bottles. Drill a large hole in the center of the clear plastic container and then place the container over the center stake that the chile is tied to. Make sure to drill air holes around the side of the container to provide for ventilation. If you do this, be sure to watch the temperature and remove when it gets warm.

In the Garden

Aji (*baccatum*) and rocotos (*pubescens*) both do great in containers. *Baccatum* can easily be grown and sometimes overwintered in 5 gallon containers. Rocotos always recommend stay in containers the first year as they do not get that large the first year and it facilitates overwintering. First year rocotos should also go in 5 gallon containers. Use high quality potting soil that has both perlite and vermiculite (or add them). Aji and rocoto will both need some sort of support as they grow and especially when they start producing peppers.

Food

Potassium and phosphorus are important for flowering and fruiting plants but be careful about adding too much nitrogen. If you over use nitrogen, you'll get a nice big robust plant, but no peppers. Use any fertilizer recommended for tomatoes — something with a low nitrogen ration like 1-3-3. If a soil test shows you need to add calcium and also raise the pH, add some limestone. If you need to add calcium but don't want to affect the pH, use gypsum. Links on soil and additives. Fertilize as needed, usually every other week.

Harvesting

You can pick bell type peppers, when they are smaller, in the beginning of summer. They may be taken when they are the size of a golf ball and frequent picking will encourage near-continuous fruit production. Immature bell peppers are soft and pliable with thin pale walls.

Otherwise, take fully mature bell peppers when they are 10 to 12cm long and have full, well-formed lobes. The older the fruit is, the thicker the skin will be.

Tip: Allow peppers to ripen to their final color later in the season to get fruit of different colors. Ripe peppers may be yellow, red, orange or purple, depending on the variety. You can continue to harvest peppers until the first frost.