



SIMPLE STEP-BY-STEP

SOW CHILLI SEEDS



Get to grips with growing this fiery crop and enjoy bumper harvests of spicy fruits

The edible with a difference, chillies are a fantastic crop to grow as they produce a flavour-sensation unlike any other. The intensity of the heat depends on the variety you are cultivating as well as at what stage of ripeness you pick the fruits – the longer they mature the hotter they get! Suited to container growing, they are great for beginners, or experienced growers who want to experiment with new and exotic types. They are also one of the first crops which can be sown this year, so for all those with itchy green-fingers you are in luck!

If you like to start growing crops as soon as you can in the new year then chillies are one of the earliest – towards the end of January you can start sowing many different varieties. Begin by filling small pots or seed trays with seed compost.

Choose a high-quality compost from a reputable supplier to help get your chillies off to a good start. Finish filling the seed tray cells and tamp down the surface of the soil so they are even and there is a nice flat surface for you to work with.



Use a small dibber or equivalent (a pen will do) to make small holes in the soil. Don't be excessive with the number of pots you prepare, just go with the amount you want and a few spare to prevent excess work and waste later on.

Get the packet of seeds ready – don't throw this away until you've made a note of the variety, or you will have surprise chillies later in the season! Sow a few seeds in each pot or seed tray section, and store any remaining in a seed tin for use next year.



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Give the seed trays a good water. You will need to monitor the moisture levels as your seeds germinate and keep the compost evenly moist. It is important to make sure they are not sitting in water, as this can cause the seedlings to rot.

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Be sure to label the containers with the plant name and variety so that there is no confusion when you begin growing other crops. Being able to look up the variety is also helpful when it comes to checking the crop's specific care needs and ascertaining ripeness.

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If sown in spring you can move your seeds to a warm greenhouse, but for early sowings place them in a heated propagator or cover the pots with clingfilm. Once seeds have germinated, pots can be taken out and put on a sunny windowsill.

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As your plants develop, move them to individual containers, going from 10cm pots to 13cm then 20cm. A good indication of when to do this is when you can see roots poking out of the holes at the bottom of the pot. This ensures they don't become pot bound.

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Plants can go outside towards the end of May, as long as the weather is warm enough. To help achieve a good crop of chillies, make sure plants are watered and fed appropriately, and pinch out growing ends so bushy growth develops once 30cm in height.

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Pick yields frequently to encourage the plant to produce a regular harvest. If you prefer mature fruits for drying, leave them for a little longer. Use scissors or a sharp knife to harvest the chillies. You can use the harvests in a wide variety of dishes.

GYO'S TOP TIPS



POLLINATION SUCCESS

To help get a great crop from your chilli plants you can hand pollinate the flowers. Use a small paintbrush, or even a cotton wool bud or your fingertip, and gently touch the inside of the flower. Do this for all of the blooms that are present and this will help abundant yields to be produced.

PESKY PROBLEMS, SOLVED!

Slugs and snails can nibble any crop, leaving their telltale notches in leaves, or sometimes just a lonely stalk! They love fresh seedlings so be wary when plants are young and tender. Crops growing inside should be safe, but for those outside there are a variety of techniques which can be used, from putting copper bands around pots to picking them off your plants by hand, or using biological controls.

Another pest to watch out for is aphids. These creatures can weaken your edibles, and cause black sooty moulds to develop. To reduce the problem caused by these pests keep a vigilant watch. As soon as any aphids are spotted deal with the issue immediately to prevent them taking hold. For larger infestations in greenhouses, biological controls are available.

5 GROW-ANYWHERE CHILLIES

You can still grow chilli peppers, even if you only have a windowsill or balcony. Here are some great varieties to try:

- 'Pretty In Purple'
- 'Razzamatazz'
- 'Medusa'
- 'Prairie Fire'
- 'Apache'

