

Not too late to add some *SPICE*

There's still time to grow a variety of peppers this summer using transplants

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Question: Is it too late to plant peppers in my garden? And is it possible to grow them in containers?

Answer: Peppers are a great addition to any vegetable garden. You can find them in a wide variety of colors, sizes, shapes and tastes – from sweet to fiery hot. They produce a large yield in a small space and are rich in vitamins A and C.

Though it is too late to grow peppers from seed in July, you can purchase transplants at local garden centers right now and still get in a successful crop before the first frost. Peppers thrive in heat and require a warm, well-drained fertile soil. The ideal temperature for growing them is 70 to 80 degrees during the daytime and 60 to 70 degrees at night.

Plant transplants after all danger of frost, usually after May 1, and space them 18 to 36 inches apart. Try to plant transplants in the evening or on a cloudy day to avoid them wilting or getting too dry. Peppers can be planted as deep as the first true leaves. Keep the plants well-watered and protected from excessive sun and wind for the first few days after they are planted.

If temperatures rise into the upper 90s and 100s, protect the plants from sunburn by covering them with floating row cover fabric or some kind of shade. If the new transplants have premature flowers or fruit on them, pinch them off so the energy of the pepper plant goes into root, stem and leaf growth, allowing the plant to become sturdy enough to support the fruit.

Should night temperatures stay cool in the summer, there are some things you can do to coax peppers along. Black plastic covering the soil around

the plants will help keep the soil warm. Surrounding each pepper plant with a round wire cage, which can easily be wrapped in clear plastic, forms a miniature greenhouse, which stores heat during cool evenings.

Be sure and leave the top open. When the plants are good-sized by July, the plastic can be removed from the cage. Selecting short season varieties of sweet peppers, like Lady Bell, Early Cal Wonder 300, Gypsy, Banana Supreme and Golden Bell, ensures a timely harvest.

Peppers should be ready to harvest in eight to 10 weeks after transplanting.



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Purchasing transplants from a local garden center is one alternative to getting in a successful crop before the first frost.



PIXABAY PHOTO

Mature peppers are thick-walled and colored according to the variety – anywhere from green to yellow, orange and red. Some varieties are purple, white and even chocolate-colored. When mature, the fruit will break easily from the plant – leave the stem attached to the fruit.

As far as growing peppers in containers, you absolutely can! Search for varieties that are labeled “compact” or “for containers.” Generally, hot peppers have a more compact shape and, therefore, are perfect for containers.

Use a pot that is at least 14 inches in diameter – though with more compact varieties you could even plant two to three plants per pot. Read the label for guidance on plant density. Use a potting soil that is labeled for larger pots, avoiding mixes that are high in peat moss, which will compress too much during the growing season, reducing root growth. If the pepper type needs extra support, use a tomato cage.

Since peppers need regular fertilizer feedings, apply a timed-released,

pelleted fertilizer (following label directions per container size) two weeks after planting, and then begin weekly watering with a balanced soluble fertilizer such as 20-20-20.

After flowering begins, switch to a high potassium fertilizer – those blended for tomatoes will do just fine. You can also use a mix of fish emulsion, kelp and bone meal for similar results. Increase feedings as the plants grow larger. Conserve soil moisture, prevent soil compaction and help suppress weed growth around pepper plants by applying mulches, such as black plastic or photo-selective plastics.

Do you have a gardening question? Please e-mail, call or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461 or 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.