



Facts About the Bell Pepper (*Capsicum annuum*)

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Introduction

- Bell peppers belong to the nightshade family, Solanaceae which includes other plants like tomatoes, eggplants, and potatoes.
- They are native to Central and South America and come in various colors including green, red, yellow, purple, and orange, each having its unique flavor.
- Green bell peppers are unripe while the other color variations are mature, which varies depending on the specific cultivar of the plant being grown.
- Bell peppers lack capsaicin, the compound responsible for heat in hot peppers.
- In Kentucky, farmers can grow bell peppers in high tunnels when they choose varieties that are suited for high tunnel conditions.

Site Selection

- Choose a site that is sunny with well-drained soil.
- Soil should be slightly acidic to neutral pH (around 6.0-7.0) for optimal growth.
- Plant seed indoors 1/4 inch deep, 8-10 weeks before the last frost date.
- Transplant seedlings into the garden or high tunnel once the soil has warmed up at least 60°F.
- Make transplant holes 3 to 4 inches deep and 14 to 18 inches apart. Space the rows 2 to 3 feet apart.
- Add low-nitrogen, high-phosphorus fertilizer to the soil during transplanting and supplemental fertilizer once fruiting starts.

Sources

"Bell Pepper." New World Encyclopedia. (2008). http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Bell_pepper Boeckmann, C. (2024). Planting, Growing, and Harvesting Bell Peppers. <https://www.almanac.com/plant/bell-peppers> Kaiser, C., and Ernst, M. (2018). Bell Peppers. CCD-CP-87. Lexington, KY: Center for Crop Diversification, University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment. <http://www.uky.edu/ccd/sites/www.uky.edu/ccd/files/bellpeppers.pdf>

Care and Maintenance

- Water bell pepper consistently, especially during hot and dry periods but avoid over-watering.
- Mulch plants to help retain soil moisture and suppress weeds.
- Support plants with cages or stakes to prevent bending branches under the weight of the fruit.
- As the plants grow, trim off low branches and pinch off growing tips to encourage fruit production.

Harvesting and Post-Harvest Handling

- Harvest bell peppers when they reach the desired size and color. Green peppers are ready earlier while other colors are allowed to fully ripen on the plant.
- Pick them when they are firm and crisp. Use sharp pruning shears to cut the peppers from the plant, leaving a short stem attached to the fruit.
- Continuously harvest bell peppers as they reach the desired size and color throughout the growing season. Regular harvesting encourages the plant to produce more fruit and prevents over ripening or spoilage.
- Bell peppers can be stored for 1 to 2 weeks after harvest in a cool spot.
- Freshly harvested bell peppers can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.