

Cultural Details: Sweet Pepper

Sweet Peppers belong to the genus *Capsicum*, but are very different from commercial pepper which is another species. Modern varieties have been selected for fruit size and shape, habit of growth, seasonality and resistance to certain diseases, especially virus. For 1996, Moles Seeds are offering a Sweet Pepper mixture, containing no less than 8 colours of fruit. Sweet peppers have very similar needs to the Tomato, although light levels are not so critical, owing to the lower temperatures at which Peppers should be grown to induce fruit setting.

Programme Guide

<i>Very early heated crop:</i>	<i>Sow November, plant December</i>
<i>Early heated crop:</i>	<i>Sow January, plant February</i>
<i>Heated crop:</i>	<i>Sow March, plant April</i>
<i>Cold Crop:</i>	<i>Sow April/early May, plant late April/mid May</i>
<i>Late crop (poss. heated):</i>	<i>Sow mid June/early July, plant end June/mid July</i>

Propagation

Sow seed in open compost at high temperatures (24-28°C), as this gives uniform, speedy germination. Prick off into blocks or pots around 8-10cm (the larger size may be desirable for delayed planting of the early heated crop). Compost should be of pH 5.8-6.3 with medium levels of N, P, K, and Mg. High salts must be avoided. Give plants good light and space out as required, holding temperatures at not less than 22-24°C if possible. Lower temperatures will suffice, but planting can be delayed. Time of propagation can vary from 4-6 weeks under best conditions, to 8 weeks or more. Note later comments about fruit setting at lower temperatures.

Planting and Spacing

This can be at 45cm square where four shoots are left with no pruning (supporting the crop as necessary with horizontal strings), down to 40cm where 2 shoots are taken and plants trimmed by lateral stopping to 1-3 leaves. Plants are set out when roots are crowding and ideally when they are in flower. Root zone temperatures should be high (22-24°C) for maximum growth. For rockwool culture, root zone warming can be used beneath the slabs. In fact peppers prefer higher root zone temperatures and lower air temperatures. Growing substrate should be adjusted to a pH of 5.8-6.3 with N, P, K, and Mg indices around 3-4 with medium salt content. Although responding to good ariel day temperatures, fruit set is better at lower temperatures. General recommendations are 15-17°C night, 18-20°C day, ventilating at 23°C in sunny weather. In dull weather, temperatures should be slightly lowered.

Pest and Disease

Basically similar to Tomatoes. Fruit blotch due to high salt is possible, and whitefly can become a problem. Monitor the crop using sticky traps, and treat accordingly. Use biological control where feasible.

Information provided for guidance only, as cultural practices and climatic circumstances vary.