



Grow at home: Peppers

Peppers in the shops normally come from warm countries as they need plenty of heat and sunlight to grow well, so how about trying to grow some in Fife? They are perfect plants for growing in pots and don't take up too much space.

You will need:

- Seeds
- Compost
- Pots (you can use old yoghurt pots or food containers with holes for drainage) - we've supplied some fibre biodegradable pots to get you started



Getting started

1. Fill your pots up with compost, but not completely to the top.
2. Put one seed onto the surface then cover with a thin layer of compost.
3. Water the pots gently so that you don't disturb your newly planted seeds.
The pots will let any excess water drain through so it's best to find something to put them on so your windowsill doesn't get too damp. Have a look in your plastic recycling - mushroom trays work.
4. It's good to put a label in each pot with the name of the plant and the date you put the seeds in.
5. Put the pots on a warm sunny windowsill and don't let them dry out.

Peppers can take a few weeks to germinate. To help keep the pots warm you can put clear plastic bags over your pots using a rubber band to secure them. This will keep in the heat and moisture. As soon as the seedlings start to appear, remove the bag and put them on a warm and bright windowsill.

Growing on

While you are looking after your plants, you can now start to think about where you will grow them in the warmer months. Peppers can be moved outside from June if you have a sunny sheltered spot, but may need to be brought in at night. They will do better kept indoors where the temperature doesn't drop as much.

Once the plants have about 3 sets of leaves, you can pot them on to a bigger pot (something around the size of a 1-litre ice-cream tub). If you're upcycling something, always remember to make some drainage holes.

To transplant

1. Half fill the new pot with compost, then:
 - a. If you're using the fibre pots provided, simply place the whole pot on top of the compost.
 - b. If you have used your own pots, hold the pot upside down, place your fingers either side of the plant, tap the base and the plant and roots should drop out. Place this on top of the compost (try to avoid touching the stalk as you could damage the plant).
2. Add more compost until the new pot is full then gently water.

When the weather starts to properly warm up and the days are getting longer, you can plant the peppers into their final container. Peppers don't need a huge pot and can do well in a 5-litre pot. You could also get a growbag and put 3 plants in one bag spaced out evenly.

Water your peppers twice a week giving them a good soak. This is better than a little every day. Once flowers appear, feed every 2 weeks to encourage healthy growth (shop-bought tomato feed is good or you can make your own feed from comfrey leaves or seaweed).

Tip: If your plants are growing too tall for your space, you can pinch out the growing tip, this will encourage lower growth and a more bushy plant.

Peppers start green and then gradually ripen to red. You can pick them to eat when they are a good size. Homegrown will not get as big as the supermarket varieties, so don't wait too long to taste them!