

Colorado Backyard Gardener

“encouraging a rooted hope”



GROWING PEPPERS

Gardening in Colorado is not for the faint at heart. This guide and others like it will help encourage a rooted hope in you as you dig in the dirt.

Handy Dandy Gardening Guide

In Colorado, our gardening season is short and the late spring and early summer nights are rather cool. This can challenge the gardener who wants to grow peppers. And since we love to add zing and kick to our cooking, we want put some peppers into our soil. Yes, they can be hard to grow in our climate. But don't despair, there are 4 tips, particular to Colorado that will help you grow these tasty treats.

Some like it hot and some like it cool. Peppers are the former. They like **HOT** weather. Thus, **TIP NUMBER ONE** requires great reserve and patience: don't plant your peppers until June 1st. If you want to plant them earlier, place them in pots so you can bring them in at night during the month of May. I also pay attention to where I buy my pepper plants. If a big box store leaves their peppers out in the open air at night (which most do), I will not buy my tomatoes and peppers there. Why? The nights in May are too cool for peppers and that plant is probably already damaged. I buy only from independent garden centers where peppers are kept above 50 degrees at night.

TIP NUMBER TWO: plant your peppers where they will get a lot of sun. Other veggies can still do fairly well if they are not in an ideal sun spot. This is not so for a pepper. Out of all the vegetables in a Colorado garden, the one that needs the most sun is the pepper plant. Peppers require MORE than full sun. Full sun is defined as 6 hours of unfiltered sun a day. This is the minimum for sun loving tomatoes. But not for peppers. The minimum is 8-10 hours of unfiltered sun a day. To accomplish this, I often grow peppers in pots. Like many backyards in Denver's urban and suburban neighborhoods, there are a lot a trees. That's a great problem to have, but it might be a problem that needs to be managed if you are a backyard gardener. Thus if I'm running out of room in the sunny areas of my yard, I grow peppers in pots. On most days I will move them around the yard, helping them to chase the sun. Or, I might put the pots on my second story deck where sun is in abundance. I have a Colorado friend who has all her peppers and tomatoes in pots on her driveway as this is the only place where there is at least 8 hours of sun each day. Some people lift weights, I lift peppers.

TIP NUMBER THREE is another tip important for Colorado gardeners. Peppers are very picky when it comes to watering. We are dry here in Colorado and this can get tricky (especially if your peppers are in pots). If you want a strong pepper plant, you must water them consistently. Persnickety peppers don't like super dry feet AND they don't like soggy feet. In other words, don't let them overly dry out and don't soak them. This is different from tomatoes. Tomatoes do like their feet to get dry in between deep watering. Not peppers. You can avoid blossom end rot following this advice.

Related to number three, **TIP NUMBER FOUR** is not particular to Colorado but I mention it anyway. Why? Because the biggest mistake in growing peppers is not giving them enough nitrogen. I often listen in on the weekly Garden Chatter Google Hangout. In March 2015, I learned from pepper expert Terry Berke (link here: <http://buff.ly/1y6FT7o>). He said something I did not know — peppers are nitrogen sponges. I thought they were similar to tomatoes in that tomatoes do NOT like too much nitrogen. Keep in mind that fertilizers have three numbers (representing nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium). On my tomatoes, I use Espoma Tomato Tone (3-4-5). When you buy fertilizer mix, the first number is nitrogen. I use Espoma Garden Tone (3-4-4) on my peppers (and other veggies) with some success (see the 2014 picture above). But this year I will up the nitrogen just a tad by giving them a nitrogen boost when the fruits are starting to form.

I hope these 4 tips are helpful. I wish you well in growing peppers this year. A fresh picked pepper for an evening's dish is a great way to end a work day! If it doesn't go well (gardening failures are normal), there is always a trip to one of our wonderful farmers markets! I love supporting our local farms! Don't you?

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