

Hints and Tips on Growing Chillies

Plant the seeds into heated propagators (as the optimum germination temperature is 25-30°C) from Jan-April, into individual plug trays. Once planted, water the capillary matting with luke warm water.

The seeds can take some weeks to germinate, depending upon the type of chilli and the growing environment. We've had seeds germinate in a few days and one took 7 weeks!

Once the germination has taken place the seedling needs direct light and continued warmth. The seedlings will reach for the light if there is insufficient direct light and they can become leggy and weak. They need to be kept moist, but chillies don't like getting their feet wet so don't over water. They also need good air flow, so we take off our propagator lids during the day to avoid damp, but take care not to dry them out.

Once the seedling has it's 2nd true set of leaves, it's time to pot on into a larger pot. We generally use 9cm pots for this next stage. If it is warm enough (between 20°C-25°C) then we put the pots in unheated propagators. Remember not to touch the stem of the plant when re-potting as this is the weakest point. Try not to disturb the root ball and only gently hold the leaves.

From around April we move the established plants into the heated greenhouse (picture A) where we ensure the temperature doesn't drop below 10°C. For ornamental plants we keep them in the 9cm pots, but for the larger fruiting varieties we pot them on, only if the temperature isn't sufficient to plant them directly into the polytunnels. They are watered daily and fed once a week with a tomato feed.

Within the polytunnels, we have experimented with 3 growing methods, planting directly into the soil (well manured), grow bags and hydroponics. The most expensive being hydroponics, which produced the strongest plants and the highest yield of fruit. It is vital to keep the night time temperature above 10°C when the fruits are developing, as this is the time when the heat level is determined in the fruit.

The next stage of the plants development is flowering (picture B). The fruits will eventually set where the flowers have died back. It is possible to identify the species of the chilli, by the flower.

Finally, remember with a lot of care, chilli plants are perennials and will give you many years of plentiful chillies.



Picture A



Picture B