

Capsicums and Chillies in the Alice Springs Region

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WHEN TO PLANT

Capsicums and chillies can be grown in the Alice Springs region most of the year, although they are sensitive to frost and will need protection if grown in winter. In summer, plant capsicums and chillies in a spot which offers some shade for at least part of the day. Chillies grow well in pots,



which allow them to be moved, if they are not growing well in their current location. A 20 cm pot will suffice for growing most chilli plants.

VARIETIES

Capsicums and chillies come in a myriad of shapes, colours and sizes, apart from various heat intensities. Chillies can be used fresh, or dried for later use, when they reach their mature red colour. Capsicums can be harvested when the flesh changes from light green to dark green or, depending on the variety, they can stay on the plant until they turn red, orange or yellow. For current varieties, check with local nurseries.

SOIL PREPARATION

Prepare the ground in advance of planting. The soil should be dug as deep as possible and compost or well rotted animal manure should be worked into it to help increase organic matter. This will improve the soil structure, aid in the soil's water-holding capacity, add micronutrients and generally make the soil and the crop healthier. Many nurseries sell products specifically for this purpose. **Many seed packets will recommend adding lime to the soil before planting but due to the region's soil alkalinity, this should not be done.**

FERTILISER

Mix fertiliser in with the soil before planting. It should be placed deeper than the seed or seedling so it does not burn the young roots. Although there are many types of fertilisers in the market, a complete granular NPK (nitrogen: phosphorus: potassium) fertiliser is recommended.

Once plants are established and begin to flower and fruit, apply a side-dressing of fertiliser. A granular fertiliser can be applied and worked into the top couple of centimetres of soil, or a liquid fertiliser can be used. Excessive use of nitrogen will result in bushy plants with few fruits. **Always follow manufacturer's recommendations when applying fertilisers.**



SEEDING AND PLANTING

Capsicums and chillies can be seeded directly into prepared ground or seedlings can be transplanted. Seeds should be planted 6 mm deep. Rows should be 50-60 cm apart and seedlings should be thinned to allow for a plant every 50-60 cm within the row. Seedlings should emerge in 10-14 days. When planting out seedlings, acclimatise them to the weather (harden-off) before placing them in the ground. Fruit should mature in 10-16 weeks.

WATERING

The seedbed should be moist at seeding and transplanting time. If direct seeding, try to keep the area moist until seedlings emerge. If transplanting, water the plants in after planting and keep them well-watered until they have established. Regular watering in the late afternoon is recommended. The plant is getting adequate water if the area around the root zone is moist.

Drip irrigation is the most effective and economical means of watering. Uneven watering can lead to blossom end rot, a deficiency thought to be brought on by too little calcium getting to the plant. More information is available in Agnote No. I19 "Blossom End Rot".

MANAGEMENT

Stake the plants to keep them off the ground. Keep weeds in the vegetable patch to a minimum. Routinely check the plants for pests, diseases and deficiency symptoms. To reduce evaporation, keep weeds from germinating and reduce soil temperature, mulch around the plants. Mulch with organic material, such as hay, or leaf or grass clippings, and dig this into the soil at the end of the growing season.

PESTS AND DISEASES

There are not many pests or diseases which affect capsicums in the Alice Springs region. If aphids are present, they can be controlled using a dilute spray of insecticidal soap, or horticultural oil. The use of pesticides is restricted. Check with the Entomology Section of DPIFM for an appropriate chemical control, or refer to www.pestinfo.nt.gov.au.

Please visit us at our website:

www.nt.gov.au/dpifm

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