Growing Peppers at Home

Soil:
- Peppers grow best in fertile, well-drained soils with high levels of organic matter.
- Peppers thrive in a soil pH ranging from 6.0 to 7.5.
- Before you transplant, a soil test is recommended to ensure you have the right nutrients to keep your peppers happy.
  - Fertilizer should be applied per the results of the soil test.
- Transplant outdoors after the last frost date and once outdoor soil temperatures reach 65°F to 70°F.

Planting:
- Peppers can be grown from seeds or purchased as transplants for the garden.
- Peppers are heat loving and our summer season is short, so it is recommended to start them indoors 6 to 8 weeks prior to transplanting outdoors.
- Allow 18 to 24 inches between plants; 12 to 24 inches between rows. However, they can take a bit of crowding.

Seeds:
- Seeds should be planted ¼ to ½ inch deep into warm soil; 65 degrees F is best.
  - Use a heat mat if available to help germinate the seeds.
- Watering of the seedlings should be done carefully.
  - There is a delicate balance between too much and too little.
  - Soil should be moist and pliable, not dry and crumbly, nor wet and dripping.
- Apply a small amount of soluble or liquid fertilizer once the seedlings have their first set of true leaves.
  - The directions for mixing a starter solution appear on all soluble fertilizer products.

Starts:
- Optionally, buy starts and plant them outdoors after the last frost date and once outdoor soil temperatures reach 65°F to 70°F.
  - Before planting outdoors, the plants should be hardened off for about 10 days.
  - Set them outdoors, in their pots, in the shade, and bring back indoors at night.
- Peppers can be grown in containers.
  - A pepper in a 5-gallon bucket would be very happy. Even a 1-gallon pot can support a pepper.

Growing:
- Peppers require at least 6 hours of direct sunlight each day.
- It takes 60 to 90 days, or up to 150 days for the hotter peppers until harvest. Keep in mind, peppers can be harvested green, so this period can be shorter.

Integrated Pest Management:
- Peppers are generally easy to grow, and a lot of growing problems can be avoided if you follow a few simple rules:
  - Keep the area clear of weeds and decomposing plant matter.
  - Space plants to allow good air circulation.
  - Maintain proper watering and do not allowing water to get on the leaves.
  - Rotate crops each year. Planting a crop in the same place year after year allows disease and pests harboring in the soil to reestablish.
Common Pests, diseases, and problems: (See Hortsense under Resources for additional information):

- Aphids: Leaves curl downward enclosing colonies of aphids. Leaves yellow, wilt, and may drop from the plant.
- Spider mites: Whitish-yellow stippling appears along the leaf midrib. Whole leaves yellow, bronze, and then die.
- Flea beetles: They chew characteristic, small, irregular “shotholes” or scalloped scoops in the lower leaves closest to the ground surface.
- Whiteflies: They feed on plant sap on the underside of infested pepper leaves. At high infestation rates, damaged leaves may wilt, turn yellow, and drop prematurely from the plant.
- Blossom end rot: A water-soaked, light-brown spot on the distal or blossom end of the fruit. This is usually a sign of inconsistent watering.
- Verticillium wilt: Leaves wilt and collapse. Rotate your crops! Some pepper varieties are more resistant than others.
- Sunburn: Appears as light, discolored areas on the surfaces of the pepper that are most exposed to the direct rays of the sun. Provide good water irrigation and cover with a shade cloth.

Resources

Vegetables: Growing Peppers in Home Gardens, WSU Publication: 
https://pubs.extension.wsu.edu/vegetables-growing-peppers-in-home-gardens-home-garden-series

Home Vegetable Gardening in Washington, WSU Publication:

WSU Hortsense Fact Sheets for pest and disease issues:
http://hortsense.cahnrs.wsu.edu/Search/SeachByPlantCategory.aspx

WSU Soil temperature guide. https://weather.wsu.edu/?p=89750

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