

## Seed Saving Guideline No. 19

# Peppers

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*Capsicum annum* and others  
Family: *Solanaceae*

Peppers and chillies spice up our lives. Is it any wonder that they have spread rapidly around the world from their South American origins and now seem integral in cuisine from all around the world. They are a regular fixture in our gardens too and one of the easiest crops to save seed from.

Pepper flowers are perfect, but will readily cross-pollinate.

### Growing & Roguing

- Grow as you would for eating. In Britain peppers are usually treated as annuals, producing seed in the same year that they are planted.
- Peppers originated in South and Central America so must be grown indoors, in a glasshouse or polytunnel to succeed in the UK climate.
- Most of the commonly grown pepper and chilli varieties are of the same species, *Capsicum annum*, meaning 'annual capsicum'. Despite this the plants can be kept alive for a few years if they are grown in a frost-free place. This will give you an early crop from the second year onwards, and the longer season means that the seeds are more likely to ripen fully.

### Pollination & Isolation

As sweet peppers and chillies are the same species it is possible for them to cross-pollinate, so you could find that your sweet pepper has a bit more bite than expected when you grow it in subsequent years. The easiest way to prevent this is to only grow one variety if you want to save the seed. Alternately a separation distance of 50m will prevent most cross-pollination, as insects will visit other flowers between the peppers. The flowers are capable of pollinating themselves, so if you have one plant on the windowsill it should still set seed. Although peppers love the heat the flowers can drop off if the temperature gets too hot. If this is happening to your plant try moving it somewhere cooler.

### Harvesting

Although we pick peppers and chillies to eat from the green stage onwards it is not until they are red that they are fully mature. If they are picked too soon the seeds will not have developed fully, so for seed saving it is best to leave them until they stop changing colour.

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## Cleaning

Take great care when cleaning chilli seeds! Wear rubber gloves if you don't want to be rubbing chilli into your eyes for days afterwards. If the peppers have been dried then consider using a dust mask for cleaning larger quantities as the dust can irritate the throat and lungs.

Any excess flesh can be rinsed off and the seeds put somewhere warm and airy to dry. Once they are dry enough that they crack when a thumbnail is dug into them, they can be stored. Remember to write the variety and the year the seed was harvested on the front of the packet.



## Storage

The seeds can last for up to 5 years in cool, dark and dry conditions.

## Returning Seed to HSL

It is vital that seed returned to HSL is not cross-pollinated. So not send seed to us that you suspect might have crossed.

Seed must be completely dry and fully cleaned. Seed that retains moisture can go mouldy in transit and will have to be discarded. It can take a few days for seed to get to us in the post so pack seed in breathable material, e.g. a paper envelope or cotton bag, and place it in a padded envelope or stout box to protect the delicate seed from impact damage.