How to Grow Ordoño Chiles
NS/S Partner Gardener Program 2023

Ordoño  *Capsicum annuum*. Beautiful, 1-2’ plants producing small, 3/4 inch long fruits that change color as they ripen from purple, yellow, orange, to red ripe. These ornamental chiles are also edible and quite hot. From Batopilas Canyon in Chihuahua, Mexico.

Chiles are one of the great Native American contributions to the cuisines of the world. There is evidence of chiles having been domesticated in Mexico at least 6,000 years ago. Chiles have been a staple of the Americas’ cuisine for thousands of years. A widely used fruit high in Vitamin C! Domesticated chiles vary profoundly in shape, size, color, pungency, and flavor.

Choosing your location

Chiles love growing in a sunny location, but it’s best to pick a spot where they get some afternoon shade.

You can transplant your starts into the ground or into pots that are 1 gallon or larger. If you garden in a location that gets early frosts, then planting in pots may make it easier to move and protect them from frost.

For seed saving, chile plants should be separated by at least 300 feet (about a football field long) from other chile varieties and from chiltepins to avoid cross pollination. If you don’t have that much distance, then be sure that the space between different varieties is full of bee-attractive blossoms to allow them to wipe their feet between chile varieties. Alternatively, you can cover plants with row cover or blossom bags when they start blossoming, to keep insects from cross pollinating with other varieties.

Growing Tips

Chiles prefer nutrient-rich, well-draining, sandy soil. Add compost to soil before planting for extra nutrients. Water the chile plants deeply every 4-7 days or when you see leaves wilting. Chiles are self pollinating but can also be pollinated by bees. Plant lots of wildflowers to get an abundance of pollinators and lots of chiles! Chilis respond favorably to commercially available organic fertilizers for tomatoes. Burying banana peels to provide an extra boost of Potassium when plants are starting to flower and set fruit will also help.

Roguing

We want these chiles to stay true to type, so it is important to keep an eye on the plants and fruits as they develop, and to remove and compost plants that appear to be unhealthy or off-type. For example:

- Fruits that appear quite different in shape and/or color than those pictured on this sheet. (Note that these chile fruits change color as they mature, from purple, yellow and orange to their final red ripe stage. The image at right is a younger plant with new purple fruits. See the back for more photos)

- Susceptibility to pests or diseases that the other plants don’t experience

- General deformity in plant growth

Removing these plants keeps these traits from being perpetuated in the population. Feel free to contact us if you are concerned about your plants.
 Harvesting Chiles for Seed Saving:

Ordoños are thin-skinned chiles that should be allowed to fully ripen to red and then dry on the plant. This allows the seed to reach full maturity. If frost or extended periods of rain occur while the chiles are drying, they can be harvested earlier to avoid mold or frost damage, as long as they are fully red-ripe. Snip the stems just above the chile fruits to harvest.

Processing Saved Seeds

Always use gloves when handling chile fruits and seeds! Using a mask is highly recommended when processing chiles!

Dry processing: Dried fruits can be stored whole in a paper bag until our group processing event if you wish; or you can process them this way: Crack open the dry fruits and use a nut pick or similar tool to scrape the seeds free. Avoid crushing the chile walls more than necessary, as this creates chaff that is hard to clean out of the seeds. You can use the remaining dried chile for cooking.

Alternate wet processing: If you must harvest before fruits have dried on the plant, slice or split the ripe chile fruits open and use gloved hands or utensils to scrape the seeds out. The spicy compound in chile (capsaicin) is most concentrated around the tissue connecting the seeds to the fruit. Spread the seeds out on a tray, screen, or plate. You can then use and eat the chile fruits! Fully dry the seeds at room temperature for at least 1 week. Avoid exposing the seeds to direct sunlight, heat, humidity, and moisture. When the seeds are dry, use gloved hands to gently break up the seeds if they are stuck in clumps.

Storing Seeds:

Once fully dry, store the seeds in a dry, closed, air-tight container or bag. Seeds are best stored under cool, dry, and dark conditions. A closet or cupboard works well. Avoid storing seeds in outdoor sheds, garages, places where temperatures can get too hot, or places where temperatures change a lot. The lifespan of seeds can be extended by years when stored in the right conditions. Remember to label your seeds! Include the variety name, year harvested, and location it was grown. You can now enjoy seeds for future planting and sharing!