

# SFA

*Seeds for Africa*

## Chillie's & Sweet Peppers

### **CAPSICUM VARIETIES:**

Chillies are perennials that have evolved in the tropics of the central Americas.

As many of us grow them in a temperate climate we need to appreciate that the plants will become dormant, even die, during the winter as the average ambient temperatures are simply too low for them. As a result of this, many people believe that chillies are an annual. However, if you can keep them alive during the cold season you will see that they flourish again in the spring and fruit through the summer and autumn. It is worth growing them in pots indoors during the winter months, and moving them outdoors when it starts warming up around September. Make sure that they get at least 4 hours a day of sunlight, even if indoors and preferably keep them by an open window during the day.

Home grown seeds are not a great idea if you are a Chilli Purist. The reason for this is that chillies are rampant cross-pollinators. This means that even if you brought commercial seeds or seedlings and keep the plants near each other, they will fruit true to variety for the first year but after that what will be produced will be a cocktail of the nearby varieties. The home gardener who fully isolates his or her chilli varieties to prevent cross-pollination is a rare person indeed!

### **GETTING YOUR SEEDS TO GERMINATE:**

Even with ideal conditions, getting chilli seeds to germinate can be a slow, irregular business. The warning here is; don't give up too early on your seeds. Just the same as the majority of other plants, chilli seeds need warmth, oxygen, and moisture before germination will occur. The ideal temperature for germinating chilli seeds is 22°C to 28°C. As a rule of thumb, when germinating plant the seed in 3 to 5mm of soil – don't go too deep.

While trying to induce seed germination, the medium that the seeds are in needs to be kept moist. Ideally this would occur with water that is not too different in temperature to the seed medium, but don't get too hung up on this point.

Depending on the variety it can take up to 6 weeks for the seeds to germinate.

I have achieved the best success with chillies by planting in seedling trays until they have germinated. I then transplant them to pots being careful not to tamper with the root system. I keep my pots indoors near an open window with a lot of sunlight until the end of September. I then move the pots outdoors in an area that gets afternoon sun. You can choose whether you want to grow them in pots or transplant into your beds. If using pots, ensure that they have good drainage, and as a rule of thumb, not smaller than 4 litres.

If you need any more advice, I find that the internet is a great source of information. Type *growing chillie's into google* and you will get a wealth of info.

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