

How to grow peppers in our climate



Gardening
Carol Savonen
Guest columnist

Question: Every year I try and grow peppers, both sweet and hot. And most years, I hardly get any. Is our climate too cool? We often have evenings that drop into the 50s at our house. Do you have any hints about how to coax peppers into bearing fruit? Also, can pepper varieties cross pollinate? I've heard people say that planting a hot pepper near a mild one may make the mild ones bear hotter peppers?

Answer: You ask a lot of good questions about growing peppers in our maritime climate. Peppers do best in growing temperatures above 70 degrees F. If you live outside an urban area that retains a lot of heat, then many of your evenings can fall below 60. At least at my place in the Coast Range this sure is true. In my experience, getting peppers to ripen is a challenge.

Most importantly, choose pepper varieties that are known to perform well in our climate. OSU vegetable breeder Jim Myers has tested many pepper varieties

over the years at the OSU Vegetable Research Farm in Corvallis. Here are the best performers:

- Italian sweet peppers - Stocky Red Roaster, Gatherer's Gold, Jolene's Red, Carmen, Red Bull's Horn
- Bell peppers - Gypsy, Yankee Bell, Northstar, Lady Bell
- Jalapenos - Conchos
- Chile pepper - Aji Amarillo

I love all the pepper varieties from local seed breeder Frank Morton's Wild Garden Seed (<https://www.wildgarden-seed.com/index.php?cPath=80>). These are meningitis produced near me in Philomath.

Save this list of stellar performers for next year if you want to grow these from seed. At this late date, to find starts of these varieties. It is too late now in May to plant peppers from seed. I start them indoors under grow lights and on a heat mat in January. It takes up to three months to grow them to transplanting size.

With luck, you can find some varieties that Territorial Seed Company or other local seed companies have produced locally. Territorial sells starts around the valley. And they mail order them, but are usually out by this time of year.

In the meantime, here are some pointers to help you coax your pepper plants into glorious fruition:

Choose the warmest garden spot possible. Peppers are tropical plants. Do you have a south facing wall that gets a lot of sun? Excellent place for peppers.

Modify your pepper growing habitat. Make a hoop house out of PVC pipe and UV-resistant plastic. Plant your peppers under this. Or reuse plastic milk jugs or large pop bottles by turning them into mini-cloches. Cut the bottoms off then place a bottle over each pepper plant. Be sure to leave the cap off the bottle to release heat. Once we hit warm temperatures, save these for next year.

Or, use black landscape fabric or weed barrier cloth to mulch the ground. Cut a hole in the fabric and plant a pepper in each.

If you can't provide these structural modifications, be sure to wait to transplant your peppers until late May or June. When the air temperature generally reaches and stays 70 to 80 degrees during the day for a few days, then it is time to put your plants in. Ideally, night time temperatures would stay above 60 for best results, as some varieties may not even blossom, much less set fruit if

temperatures dip below 60 degrees. It's a crap shoot in our climate.

Plant peppers into fertile, well-drained soil. It is best to transplant on a cloudy day or just after sunset. To learn more, check out the OSU Extension publication "Grow Your Own Peppers."

Peppers take at least a month and a half to three months to ripen from the time they set fruit, depending on the variety. Since they are mostly self-pollinated, it is highly unlikely that hot peppers will affect the flavor of nearby sweet peppers, or vice-versa.

Different pepper varieties planted nearby may occasionally cross-pollinate due to wind or a stray bee, but this does not affect the flavor of this year's crop. It may affect the genetics of the seeds inside though. So if you are worried about crossing between varieties, purchase, rather than save, your own pepper seed from the garden to avoid unpredictable outcomes next year.

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Meningitis

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vention. But nationwide rates of meningococcal disease are at historic lows.

Several types of bacteria can cause meningitis including Streptococcus pneumoniae, listeria, E.coli and Neisseria meningitidis, which causes meningococcal disease.

Babies are at an increased risk of contracting meningitis, which can be spread during birth, in the air through coughing and sneezing and via contaminated food.

Marion County Health Officer Dr. Karen Landers said all invasive meningococcal diseases are required to be reported to the county within 24 hours.

She confirmed the county received a report of Blaize's death and conducted an investigation into who else may have been infected. She also confirmed his death was caused by a meningococcal disease.

Meningococcal disease is spread though the sharing of respiratory and throat secretions, like coughing, kissing and lengthy, close contact.

"Our main concern is to identify those people who have recently been in close contact with the ill person," Landers said. "We assure that they are aware of the symptoms of this severe and rapidly progressive illness so that they can seek care at the earliest sign of illness."

Those in close contact with the infected person are also treated with antibiotics as a preventative measure.

Landers said the county tracks all cases of reportable infections in Marion County through a comprehensive statewide database.

10 percent of cases are fatal

Dr. Ann Thomas, a public health physician with the Oregon Health Authority, said Oregon sees an average of 22 meningococcal cases a year. About 10 percent of those cases occur in children under the age of 1, and 10 percent of the

total cases are fatal.

Routine infant vaccinations can stave off some of the infections like Haemophilus influenzae and pneumococcal that cause meningitis, Thomas said.

The vaccine for the Neisseria meningitidis that causes meningococcal disease is recommended for preteens and teens. It is usually only given to babies with spleen diseases and other high-risk factors.

Thomas advised parents to always immediately check with their medical providers if their child exhibits any symptoms of meningitis.

She warned that some meningitis symptoms can be subtle and harder to spot, especially in infants.

Poff said she was not told which form of meningitis her son contracted. Her family was treated with antibiotics after Blaize's death, and Poff is concerned it could be contagious.

"I want people to be aware it's around," she said.

Be cautious, she advised, adding,

"Love your babies as much as you can, because life is so short and they can be taken away from you at any moment."

A friend created a GoFundMe fundraiser in Blaize's honor. Poff is working to finalize memorial plans.

Symptoms of meningitis

- Fever
- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Sensitivity to light
- Confusion

Note: Sometimes babies may not exhibit symptoms like headache, fever and neck stiffness. The CDC advises parents to immediately contact a doctor if their child exhibits these symptoms.

For questions, comments and news tips, email reporter Whitney Woodworth at wmwoodworth@statesman-journal.com, call 503-399-6884 or follow on Twitter @wmwoodworth

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