How to Grow Chillies

You can buy Chilli plants in garden centres or you can sow seeds from mid-February in a heated propagator or on a warm windowsill, but they will need a minimum temperature of 18°C to germinate. Starting Chillies off early in the year will give them the best opportunity to ripen over the summer.

- Sow the seeds thinly on top of a good seed compost, covering with a light layer of fine compost or vermiculite. Keep the compost just moist, as the seeds will not germinate if it dries out.
- Carefully prick out the seedlings into individual pots and pot on until they're ready to go into their final container, which needs to be 25-30 cm wide.
- If you want to grow them outside, wait until all risk of frost has passed and harden them off before moving to a spot in full sun.
- Feed the plants weekly with a tomato fertilizer from when the first of the flowers appear and water when the compost is dry to the touch.
- Stake all but the shortest of varieties with a cane to support the stems and the weight of the developing fruit.
- Fruit should ripen by September or October, depending on the summer.
- If your Chillies are not ripening outside, bring the whole plant inside to a sunny window sill to encourage the process.
- If you want Chillies the following year, try bringing the plant inside as soon as frost threatens.
- You can continue harvesting the ripe Chillies during the winter and lightly cut back the plant to encourage fresh growth in February.