

Christmas Peppers

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Want to brighten up and heat up the holiday season, how about growing some ornamental peppers these dwarf plants with green, purple, and variegated leaves boasting glossy, bright purple, fire engine red, orange, banana yellow and white objects hanging from them like raindrops from the branches. The colorful fruit are not only spicy but they are easy to take care of inside the house.

The ornamental pepper is a beautiful compact and dwarf versions of the hot pepper we know. The colors of the peppers can carry over to the foliage. These exotic looking plants belong to the *Capsicum annum* family. Gardeners also know them as Christmas peppers with varieties such as Holiday Flame, Pretty Purple, and Black Pearl. 'Black Olive' keeps its beauty season long and kept its upright habit with nicely draping leaves and dark purple/black fruit which appeared in small clusters along the stems. As summer progresses, the fruits mature to red giving a beautiful contrast against the dark purple foliage and bright purple flowers. 'Cayennetta' is an excellent tasting mildly spicy pepper that is very easy to grow, even for novice gardeners. This 3 to 4-inch chili pepper yielded bigger fruits from a very well branched upright plant that required no staking which would make it perfect for a container or patio planter. Unique to this variety is that it has good cold tolerance as well as dense foliage cover to protect the fruits from sun scorch and it handled extreme heat very well. This pepper is an all-around good choice no matter where you are gardening. Everyone will love the excellent pepper flavor that outshone all the comparison varieties.

'Chilly Chili,' as the name implies, has non-pungent fruit. The "heat" was bred out of the peppers, which is perfect for households with children who like to explore their environment. The fruit changes color from yellow to orange and matures at red. The petite 2-inch peppers can be used as clever ornamental garnishes on salads or with ethnic entrees.

Ornamental peppers are a great addition for container gardening or to bring in as a houseplant once the temperatures reach below 55 degrees. It will create a wonderful source of color among your houseplants and bloom up to six weeks. You can even leave the peppers on the plant to dry. Once the peppers dry, you can harvest the seeds. Keep in a sunny window and keep the soil moist but not soaked. You can pinch the new growth or pick the peppers to encourage branching. Although these ornamentals are grown for their aesthetic value; these beauties are also edible and can be used in food, and each have different degrees of hotness.

If you notice, many ornamental pepper plants have multiple colors of peppers growing on a single plant. This signifies the different stages of ripening. Although the same plant, peppers ripen in different stages. The peppers on one plant can turn from they can turn from bright white to neon yellow, to true orange, to fire-engine red, and even to eggplant purple because they are on different schedules of ripening. Although the typical pepper hangs down under the leaves, some ornamentals carry their peppers above the foliage standing upright.

Whether you plant them in outside planters, place them among your houseplants, or use them for cooking these beauties are hot!

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