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# Tips for Germinating Bird Pepper Seeds

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*Capsicum annuum* var. *glabriusculum* (Solanaceae) is a short-lived, shrubby perennial native to the southeastern United States and Mexico. It is the wild relative from which bell-peppers and chile peppers are both derived. Its seeds are sometimes difficult to germinate and three methods of facilitating germination are discussed.

KEYWORDS: *Capsicum*, Solanaceae, bird pepper, chile pepper, edible plant, kitchen garden plant, native plant, perennial.

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**Figure 1.** A handful of hot little bird peppers ready to be added to a favorite recipe or to dry and crush for use as a condiment.

The hot little chile-peppers pictured above are known as *bird pepper*, because birds love them. They are the wild ancestors from which both hot chile peppers and sweet bell peppers were derived.

Bird pepper (*Capsicum annuum* var. *glabriusculum*) has a reputation for being difficult to germinate. Here are a few techniques that have worked for various gardeners. No matter what technique you try, remember that **patience is important** since bird pepper seeds can sometimes take several months to germinate. No matter what technique is used, the seeds need to be sown in a well-drained potting mix and kept under warm conditions. The seeds do not germinate well under cold, wet, soggy conditions.

Regardless as to what technique is used, the seeds must be removed from the individual chiles. Do not try these techniques using whole chiles.

**TECHNIQUE 1:** Soak the cleaned seeds in a cup of water for 48 hours and change the water every 6-8 hours. After 48 hours, sow the seed normally. Soaking in water may remove water soluble germination inhibitors and may stimulate germination.

**TECHNIQUE 2:** Soak the cleaned seeds for a few hours in room temperature orange juice. After soaking in orange juice, wash the seeds with fresh water and sow normally. The mildly acidic orange juice mimics the passage of the seeds through the digestive tract of a bird and may stimulate germination.

**TECHNIQUE 3:** Fill a pot with sphagnum moss. Use a clay pot or a light colored (white or beige) plastic pot (black pots get too hot for the seeds when placed in full sun). Sow the seeds and lightly cover the surface of the moss with a layer of finely cut-up pine needles to keep birds from rooting through the moss. Most birds find the moss irresistible and if they can see the strands of sphagnum moss they will tug at them and otherwise root through the pot. Leave the pot fully exposed to the elements including rain and sunshine. The advantage of sphagnum moss is that, even when soaking wet, it holds a lot of air and keeps the seeds from rotting. Exposure to natural cycles of rain and temperature mimics conditions in the wild and may stimulate germination. Once the seeds germinate, plant in regular soil. If you allow the seedlings to grow in sphagnum moss they may have trouble adjusting to regular soil when planted in the ground.

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