

CAPSICUM
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Introduction

The National Garden Bureau has named 2026 the Year of the Hot Pepper, spotlighting the genus *Capsicum* for its extraordinary diversity - from mild bell peppers to record-setting super-hots that push past a million Scoville Heat Units. It's a fitting excuse to talk about a different branch of that same family tree: ornamental *Capsicum*, the plants grown for their foliage and fruit color, rather than for the kitchen.

Ornamental peppers share their genus and general growing needs with culinary chilies, and many are bred from the same species gardeners already know, *Capsicum annuum*. What sets our varieties apart is purpose: they have been selected and grown for compact habit, striking foliage color, and long-lasting fruit display - NOT for flavor, heat management, or food safety.

For many growers, ornamental *Capsicum* is grown and treated as a decorative bedding and container plant - not a food crop. While there are several reasons explained in full detail later in this guide, the short version is: these plants are a genuine relative of the edible pepper, but just a distinctly different product. With that distinction clearly drawn, ornamental *Capsicum* earns its place in the fall garden on its own merits: compact plants loaded with glossy, jewel-toned fruit in black, purple, orange, and red, holding color for weeks.

Not for the Table: Why These are Decorative Only

Even though ornamental Capsicum looks edible, it's worth being extra clear about what you're getting when you buy these varieties. None of this information is meant to diminish the plant - we love Capsicum! It is a genuine, distinct horticultural category, and one of the best ways to bring the pepper family into a fall garden without any of the kitchen guesswork.

Grown for Display, Not for Food Safety

Ornamental varieties are bred and selected for their compact habit, foliage color, and long fruit retention - not for flavor or predictable heat. Some, like 'Medusa', are quite mild in flavor, while others, in the same class of plant generally, can be intensely hot. But none of the breeding done by developers targets this particular plant as a food crop.

How the Plants are Grown

Just as importantly (if not more!), bedding and container plants sold for ornamental use are grown and treated differently than food crops. Products used on ornamental plantings are not necessarily labeled or approved for crops intended to be consumed. That's true of ornamental Capsicum, as well as kale, pansies, or any other edible-look-alike sold as a decorative annual.

Our Guidance

Enjoy these plants for exactly what they are: compact, colorful, low-maintenance container and bedding plants. Please don't eat the fruit and keep plants out of reach of children and small pets who might be tempted by the bright colors. If you're looking to grow peppers for the kitchen, we recommend sourcing other options from growers who specialize in culinary pepper starts!



How the Color Show Happens

The slow color change that makes ornamental Capsicum so satisfying to watch is the same chemistry at work in every pepper, ornamental or edible.

Chlorophyll Steps Aside

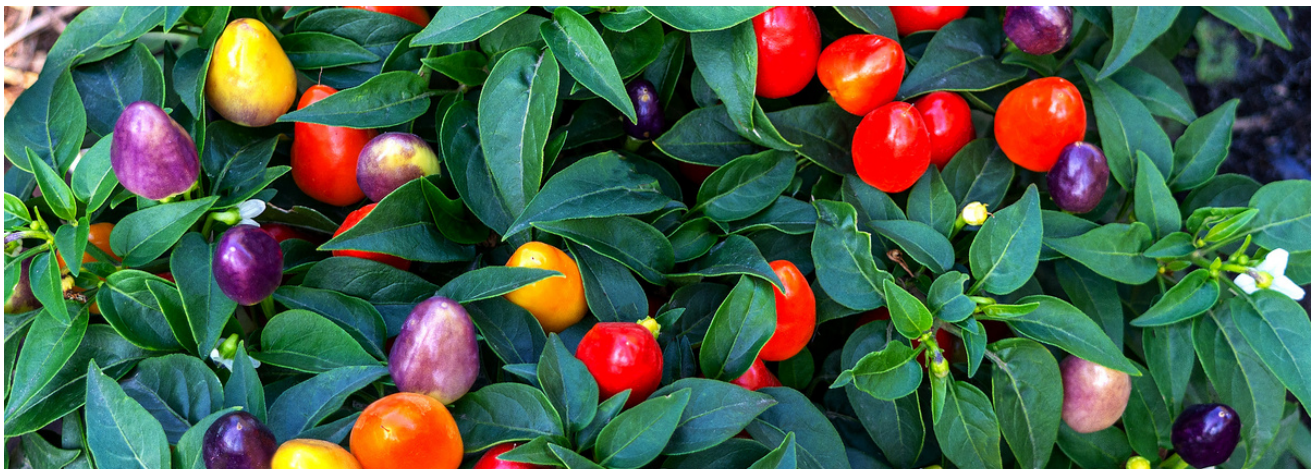
Unripe pepper fruit is green (or in varieties like ‘Onyx Red’, nearly black) because chlorophyll controls the fruit’s pigmentation. As the fruit matures, chlorophyll breaks down, and any other pigments (carotenoids for orange and yellow, anthocyanins for purple and near-black) that are already present become visible, before most varieties finish by producing red carotenoids, such as capsanthin.

Why Some Varieties Show Every Color at Once!

Varieties like ‘Sangria’, ‘Acapulco Multicolor’, and ‘Medusa’ are especially prized because they hold fruit at every stage of ripeness simultaneously. A single plant carries green, orange, purple, and red fruit together, since new flowers and fruit continue forming even as earlier fruit finishes ripening.

Same Genus, Different Job

Ornamental capsicum has the same ripening sequence that the National Garden Bureau is highlighting in its Year of the Hot Pepper materials for culinary varieties. It is proof that ornamental and edible Capsicum really are close relative, even though one is bred for the table and the other for the flower bed.



Growing Tips & Care

Ornamental Capsicum is grown as a tender annual in our climate and rewards straightforward care. Many of the care requirements are the same that suit any pepper plant!

Light & Timing

Ornamental Capsicum likes full sun (six or more hours daily) to produce the densest fruit set and the richest foliage color, especially in black- and purple-leaved varieties, such as 'Onyx Red' and 'Calico'. However, don't rush the season! These plants are cold-sensitive and shouldn't go outside or be moved to an unprotected area until temperatures are reliably above 50°F.

Soil & Water

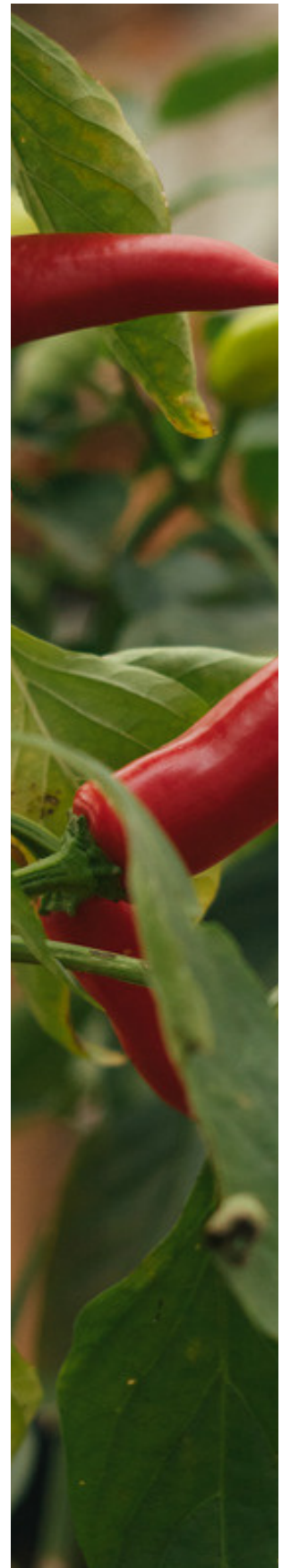
Well-drained, moderately fertile soil is ideal. Like all peppers, ornamental types dislike soggy roots. Water on a regular schedule and let the top 1" of soil dry between waterings. Consistent moisture keeps fruit production steady without inviting root rot.

Feeding & Tidying

A balanced fertilizer every few weeks keeps plants productive through the fall. Snip off any damaged leaves or spent fruit to keep the display neat - pruning needs are otherwise minimal, since most varieties keep a naturally tidy, well-branched shape on their own.

Right-Size the Container

Most ornamental varieties stay compact in height and spread, which make them perfect for a smaller pot size. A container that is too large will hold excess moisture around the roots longer than the plant actually wants.



Featured Varieties



Acapulco Multicolor

Narrow, upright fruit in a mix of purple, orange, and red, (often all at once!) on the same, compact plant.



Calico

Grown as much for foliage as fruit, Calico's leaves are strikingly variegated in green, cream, and purple, with small, black fruit which matures to red.



Medusa

Long, thin, twisting fruit shifts from ivory to yellow, orange, and red. A single plant can carry dozens at once for a fireworks effect!



Onyx Red

Near-black foliage and stems set off small round fruit that opens black and ripens to a glossy, bright red.



Sangria

A heavy-fruited favorite carrying magenta, orange, and red fruit together for a true confetti effect over a tidy, upright, well-branching plant.

Design Ideas for Fall Displays

Ornamental Capsicum's real strength is color that holds - fruit stays showy on the plant for weeks, long after summer flowers have finished.



Fall Container Star

Use a bushier variety, like 'Sangria' or 'Acapulco Multicolor' as the "thriller" or "filler" in an autumn container alongside ornamental kale, mums, and a trailing standout. Jewel-toned fruit works well with kale's blue-green/purple tones.



Black Foliage Accent

'Onyx Red' has near-black leaves that make a dramatic backdrop for lighter companions. Try pairing it with white or pale-yellow Chrysanthemums, or silvery Senecio, for high contrast in a border or window box.



Tabletop & Porch Decor

Because most varieties stay compact and well-behaved in pots, a row of mixed, ornamental Capsicum along a porch rail or entry table reads as a ready-made vignette with almost no styling required.



Textural Contrast in Beds

Calico's variegated cream/purple/green foliage adds visual interest even before fruiting, making it a strong edging plant next to solid-green perennials, herbs, or grasses.