



## Capsicum and Chilli

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**Name:** Capsicum *Capsicum annuum* (Solanaceae) Chillies *Capsicum frutescens*.

**Origin:** Tropical Central America.

**Distribution:** Grown commercially in all tropical and sub-tropical countries.

**Australian Distribution:** Capsicum and chillies are grown in most vegetable regions in Australia that have a temperature range of 15°C to 32°C.

**Preferred Climate and Soil Types:** Capsicums and chillies thrive in warm conditions and are particularly sensitive to cold and do not grow below 10°C. High temperatures above 32°C can affect pollination. Rain and high humidity can increase diseases. They grow best in deep well drained, medium textured soils, but will not tolerate saline water.

**Description:** The plants are herbaceous annual or biennial to 90 cm. Leaves are variable in size, alternate and arise singly along the stem. Flowers are white, pale green or purple and are pollinated by wind or insects. Fruit can be green, yellow, orange, red, purple or black, and can be round, conical, elongate, oblate or bell shaped, 6 mm to 340 mm long.

**Varieties:** There are many varieties available and should be chosen to suit the area in which they are grown.

### Capsicums:

- *Bell* - these are the main types grown, have generally four lobes and thick sweet flesh. Green and red are the most common colours and some turn yellow, orange, purple or black. There are many varieties of bell capsicums.
- *Long sweet yellow (banana)* - these are long and tapered and are harvested when yellow.

**Chillies:** Chillies are basically capsicums that taste hot due to the chemical alkaloid, capsaicin. This is more concentrated around the seed. The heat level of the chilli depends on the type, variety and growing conditions. There are many different types from the small birds eye to the cayenne and the serrano. Also many varieties exist within these types.

**Culture:** Plants are propagated as seedlings and planted out into mounded beds generally with plastic mulch and drip irrigation layed out. Plants can be planted 20 cm apart into single rows or 40 cm apart in double rows. They like to be well watered and wind protection is essential as plants are brittle and fruit can rub easily.

**Pests and Diseases:** There are several pests and diseases that affect this crop, like caterpillars, fruit fly, aphids, rots, wilts and viruses. Regular monitoring of the crop and appropriate control methods will help reduce incidences of loss and damage to the crop.

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**Fruiting Season:** Around Darwin capsicums and chillies can be grown all year.

**Harvesting:** Capsicums can be picked green as soon as they are a suitable size, (about 12 weeks) or they are left to mature and turn red. Chillies are picked at the required colour stage.

**Storage Conditions:** Capsicums and chillies should not be stored for long periods, or with fruit such as tomatoes that produce ethylene. Storage conditions should be 7-13°C at 90-95% relative humidity for a maximum period of two to three weeks.

**Culinary Use:** Capsicums are a popular vegetable eaten raw in salads or cooked in many Asian dishes. Chillies are eaten raw or used in cooking as a condiment for flavouring. They are also used as a herbal medicine to treat poor circulation, fever and colds, and digestive disorders. Chillies have also been used as an insecticidal spray.