

# NYBG/125

## BRONX GREEN-UP SERRANO PEPPER GROWING TIPS FOR BRONX GARDENERS



Bronx Green-Up, the community gardening outreach program of The New York Botanical Garden, is excited to be part of a collaboration with The Bronx Hot Sauce. Included here are some tips and instructions for growing and harvesting your own serrano peppers.

Serrano peppers are native to the mountains of south-central Mexico, and now grow in many areas of the Bronx. The plants can grow to a height of 2–3 feet and yield large quantities of peppers.

### Starting Seeds Indoors

Sow seeds indoors in early to mid March, about 6–8 weeks before you plan on transplanting outside. Seeds germinate best when soil temperature is 80°F or higher and will not germinate below 55°F.

Find a warm (65°F or above) and sunny location (or use grow lights). Low light conditions will result in leggy and weak plants.

A couple of weeks after the danger of frost has passed (in NYC this is generally by April 15), it is safe to transplant your seedlings into the garden. As they have been protected indoors, it is important to allow them to adjust to the cooler outdoor temperatures and direct sunlight. Keep the plants outside for two hours per day and gradually increase the time to a full day over the course of a week or so. This process is called hardening off.

### Transplanting into the Garden

If planting in-ground, place your pepper plants 12 to 24 inches apart, in rows 24 to 36 inches apart. Space the rows about 14 to 16 inches apart if planting in raised beds. Select a location that receives plenty of light and heat, and has not been used for tomatoes, potatoes, or other members of the nightshade family for the past few years (ideally 4 years). Peppers will do best with soil that is fertile, lightweight, slightly acidic (pH 5.5–7.0), and well-drained.

After the plants have been established and the soil has warmed, you can mulch the plants to keep in moisture and reduce weeds.

Your plants need a steady supply of water. Water deeply at least 3 times per week, especially in the driest period of summer. Peppers like the heat, so full sun exposure is ideal, but they also thrive with more water.

If temperatures are too hot or too cool, peppers may reduce fruit set or have stunted growth. If plants remain small and have started to bud and flower, pick off buds and flowers to encourage leafy growth (peppers will come later, but you will get more of them).

### Fertilizing & Other Points

We don't recommend that you use synthetic pesticides or fertilizers in your community gardens. If you'd like to fertilize your plants, add finished compost in the planting holes when you transplant, or top-dress the garden surface with a 2- to 3-inch layer of compost.

You can also use fully composted chicken manure if your garden keeps chickens. Fish and seaweed-based fertilizers like Neptune's are also good. Dilute them in water and drench the soil around the roots of the plants, following the recommendations on the package.

Stake your plants for best performance. Once they are heavy with peppers, staked plants grow best, with their peppers kept off the ground.

For the purpose of making The Bronx Hot Sauce, we encourage you to harvest the peppers when GREEN (it's a green sauce).

Green serrano peppers can be harvested about 2 to 3 months after transplanting, when the peppers have reached full-size (about 2–3 inches), depending on weather conditions. Use garden shears, scissors, or carefully pinch off the peppers with your nails (be sure to clean your hands and nails before and after harvest).

Do not rinse the peppers after harvesting, as they store better dry.

### Keep in Touch

Check the Bronx Hot Sauce blog as the season progresses for in-season tips and pointers. Feel free to share any and all wisdom along the way! **[bronxhotsauce.com](http://bronxhotsauce.com)**



Bronx Green-Up, the community gardening outreach program of The New York Botanical Garden, provides horticultural advice, technical assistance, and training to community gardeners, school groups, and other organizations interested in improving urban neighborhoods through greening projects. Please visit **[nybg.org/green\\_up](http://nybg.org/green_up)** for more information.

To sign up for our mailing list or e-list, send your contact information to **[bronxgreenup@nybg.org](mailto:bronxgreenup@nybg.org)**.