



**CLIPPINGS** a weekly column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Week of June 10, 2019

**For Immediate Release**

**Ornamental Peppers – Hot in Color and Taste!**

*Beth Ellen Doran, Iowa Master Gardener*

Looking to add color and variety to your garden or patio? My suggestion is to plant an ornamental pepper!

Although edible, ornamental peppers are grown primarily for their pretty foliage and colorful fruits. But, don't be fooled - many are very hot! However, ornamental peppers are not known for flavor.

*Capsicum annuum* is an annual species of ornamental peppers commonly used in borders or patio pots. They are compact plants – usually 12 to 18 inches high and wide – that prefer full sun and well-drained soil. They do not tolerate consistently wet soil.

In fact, ornamental peppers are known for their drought tolerance. Aside from the plant's genetics, both drought and high average night temperatures can increase the "hotness" of the pepper.

Depending on the variety, foliage color may be purple, green, or variegated with patches of white, purple or green. The flowers are small and range in color – purple, white and pink. Another unique feature of the ornamental peppers is where the peppers occur on the plant. In most cases, the peppers are borne upright and above the foliage.



*Photo Credit:  
All-America Selections  
Ornamental Pepper NuMex  
Easter, 2014 AAS Bedding  
Plant Winner*

The fruit of the ornamental peppers varies in shape, ranging from round to conical and slim and tapered. There are even twisted forms of the slim, tapered fruits.

But, the real boldness of the ornamental pepper is the color of the fruit, which depends on the variety and the stage of maturity. Some fruits are round and shiny black; others may be red, purple, cream, yellow or orange.

Another bonus for the ornamental pepper is its growing season. Usually the leaves are topped by bright-colored fruits that form in July and hold on the plant until frost. Be adventurous, use the fruit to add color to the dinner plate as a garnish or in a fresh salsa. But, remember – some of these little peppers can pack a lot of heat!

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