

Christmas Peppers and Holiday lights

Ornamental peppers with their small varied shapes lend themselves to holiday festivities and Christmas decorations. The fruit of one ornamental pepper in particular, the Medusa, has tiny fruit that look like something you would string up in place of holiday tree lights.

The full spectrum of color produced by ornamental peppers peaks in the fall, and though mine appear wrinkled from chilling outdoors, the colors remain vibrant. Ornamental peppers are becoming popular as house plants. (had I known this sooner, my plants would have come inside during the fall) Ornamental peppers are sometimes used to add color to flower arrangements, particularly during holiday season. Of course, there are also the artificial peppers that are, in fact, real Christmas tree lights.

And like Christmas lights, ornamentals come in a surprising array of color ranging from blue to various reds, oranges, gold and yellows. In addition to being interesting holiday plants, they make good edging plants outdoors. They also work well in a perennial border.

“Ornamental peppers are particularly striking or colorful, usually quite small-podded pepper plants. Ornamental peppers can be used for culinary purposes, though they often have the heat but not the distinctive flavor that other peppers do.” *Rosalind Creasy from The Edible Pepper Garden.*

Varieties of ornamental peppers:

- Aurora: 75 days, small green to lavender, orange to red.
- Fiesta: (Christmas) 90 days, hot, slim. Red fruit cluster.
- Poinsettia: 65-70 days, green to purple to red.
- Super Chili: 65-90 days, green to orange to red, hybrid.
- Variegata: (many cultivars) 90 days, green and purple. Variegated foliage of white, green and purple, with small fruit similar to jalapeños.
- Yellow Ornamental: Bright yellow, spicy and hot.
- Almapaprika: 65 days, white to red.
- Paprika Supreme: 70 days green, 80 days red, hybrid.
- Bolivian Rainbow Chili: Purple foliage and purple flowers.
- Nu Mex Twilight: Purple fruit that ripens to yellow, orange and red. Used in wreaths.
- Orange Mini-Bell: Produces tiny bell peppers
- Orange Thai: Produces upright fruit that mature a bright orange color.
- Poinsettia Pepper: Fruit forms a circle like the leaves of a real Poinsettia plant.
- Medusa - Hot, colorful, twisted fruits like Christmas lights.
- Pretty Purple - Very hot, tiny purple peppers that ripen red.

A plant in full production may have fruit of different colors in different stages of ripeness. Keep them on the dry side and the plants will remain more compact. Once fruit have set don't fertilize them at all. The fruit will stay on the plant for a very long time,

and can stay colorful for months until it dries. Ornamental peppers are easy to start from seed, but you need to plan ahead and plant them in July to have fruiting plants for Christmas.

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