

# Homestyle Gardening

## Chilli man Dan's hot tips for a tasty crop

If you can grow chillies in the wilds of Northumberland, then you can grow them just about anywhere.

Dan May is the proud owner of what may well be the world's most northerly chilli farm in Haltwhistle and founder of Trees Can't Dance, a company producing a range of all natural chilli sauces, marinades and pickles. Here are his hot tips for growing chillies.

1. You can plant your seeds anytime between January and May, but by planting them early you give the chillies time to ripen in the warm summer months. It is worth noting that the hottest (and more unusual) varieties of chilli tend to have the longest growing season as they are used to life in the tropics.

2. To start, fill a multi-cell seed tray with multipurpose compost, firm down and moisten with water. Place a seed in each cell and lightly cover with compost and water again using a very fine rose. I often cover my freshly sown seeds in a thin layer of vermiculite rather than compost as this has a more open structure and makes it easier for the first shoots of growth to push into the light.

3. If your seed tray did not come with a clear lid then improvise by placing a sheet of cling film over the tray to create a greenhouse effect and place in an airing cupboard or anywhere similarly warm to germinate. Chilli seeds like temperatures of around 25 degrees to encourage swift germination.

### Seedlings

4. Check your seeds daily for signs of life and keep the compost moist. Be careful not to over water them, the compost should be slightly damp to the touch but not sodden.

5. As soon as seedlings appear (this can take anything between 2 - 4 weeks) they need sunlight so place them in a warm place with plenty of daylight, a windowsill above a radiator is ideal. Keep the compost moist.

6. Remember that young seedlings are very fragile and can easily be scorched if left in direct sunlight.

7. When your seedlings sprout a second set of leaves (their first true leaves) it's time to transplant them to their own pots. A 7cm diameter pot is a good start. Fill your pot with compost, moisten and dig a well for the seedling, gently firm the compost around it.

8. You can boost your crop by feeding your plants once a week with a dilute mix of a liquid tomato fertilizer.

9. Once your plants reach between 12cm



Dan May - hot property

- 15cm it's time to move your plants to a bigger pot. A 12 cm diameter pot will be big enough for one plant or alternatively you can fit 3 in a 30 cm pot

10. By the time your plants are about 20cm it's a good idea to give them some support by gently tying them to a bit of cane with some twine.

11. When they reach 30cm, you can pinch out the growing tips to encourage outward "bushy" growth. This is ideally done just above the fifth set of leaves.

12. By mid May it's warm enough to put your plants outside, make sure you place them in a sheltered area, but one where they'll receive plenty of sunlight.

13. At this stage it might be an idea to move your plants to a bigger sturdier pot.

14. Continue feeding your plant with the fertilizer dilution (as you would a tomato plant), as the maker's recommendations.

15. If you've planted in January you should be able to harvest some of your chillies in July, varieties such as the habanero take longer to develop.

## Sophie's tools have a woman's touch

**A top designer and Sheffield garden tool manufacturer have collaborated to produce a lovely range for the garden and outdoors.**

Sophie Conran has created a stunning collection of ergonomically advanced tools, specifically designed with the female hand in mind with Burgon & Ball.

The collection also includes fun gift sets for lovers of pottering about outside with friends and family.

Sophie says "Gardening and its rich rewards are a fantastic panacea to the hectic pace of life that we all deal with day to day. I grew up with parents who were both enthusiastic gardeners and from an early age have been able to delight in the peace and beauty to be found in the garden. Wherever I have found myself, I have always had the urge to get my hands into some earth.

"I try to spend as much time as

possible outside; creating a garden is a fantastically rewarding pastime. As with most families, my home revolves around the kitchen, which is filled with gorgeous changing blooms from the garden and a rather sporadic supply of fragrant herbs and glorious mis-shapen vegetables.

"Not surprisingly coming from a family of designers I have been sketching out ideas for products for as long as I can remember.

### Problems

"As a gardener I have always dreamed of creating a range of garden tools and accessories. I believe that tools should be functional and beautiful, and make each job a pleasure.

"One of the problems I face as a woman when gardening is that my hands are generally too small for standard tools. My designs specifically address this issue and I hope will add to the joy of gardening.

"I'm immensely proud of these tools, which are a joy to work with. I hope you love them too. The better the tools, the easier the job."



Sophie Conran's gardening tools come with a superb finish



Sophie Conran - loves pottering around in the garden

● All the tools in the collection feature mirror polished stainless steel bodies - a quick wipe down after use to keep them in perfect condition.

● The ferrules, featuring the hallmark, are solid brass - ensuring a secure connection between head and handle.

● Sophie chose natural waxed beech wood for the handle. It not

only looks beautiful, it feels wonderful and over time will slowly mould itself to the shape of your hand.

● Finally - something so lovely deserves to be kept in its own special place, so each tool is presented in a wonderful box.

The sets are available from the end of the month in garden centres, RHS centres, National Trust and from Burgonandball.com