

Overwintering your chilli plants

Chilli plants are not annuals. They are in fact short lived perennials, so if you can successfully overwinter your plants you get fresh chillies much earlier the next season than growing each year from seed.

In the winter months, a plant reacts to the lower temperatures and light levels and effectively shuts down new growth phases, so pretty much so that all signs of life disappear. It can look like the plant as died. However the plant is just protecting itself from the cold and reduces its need for light and food. Once the weather improves in the spring, the hibernation period will reverse and the plant will sprout new growth.

Some varieties overwinter much better than others. From experience we have found that chillies from the genus of *Baccatum*, *Chinense*, *Frutescens* and *Pubescens* survive winter much better than annuum varieties. Simply put, we have had better success overwintering hotter varieties than the milder ones.

Also if you get a poor crop of say “Habaneros” when you grow them from seed in the first year, you will usually get a much better crop in year 2, so it is worth persevering!

We have never had much success overwintering annuum varieties such as Cayenne or Jalapenos... (or anything that grows tall on a single stem) . However these are easy to grow from seed anyway.

Dartmoor Chilli Farm – 2011 winter



Here is a little guide for successfully overwintering your plants :

- 1) Pick a good example.. It's the end of the season. Everything in the tunnels is dying off. So be selective. Pick a good looking plant which seems to be surviving better than others. A plant with good healthy stems and signs of new growth rather than blackened or diseased plants.

If the plant is in a very large pot, you may want to consider repotting with some new compost into a slightly smaller pot. Soil can get very cold!

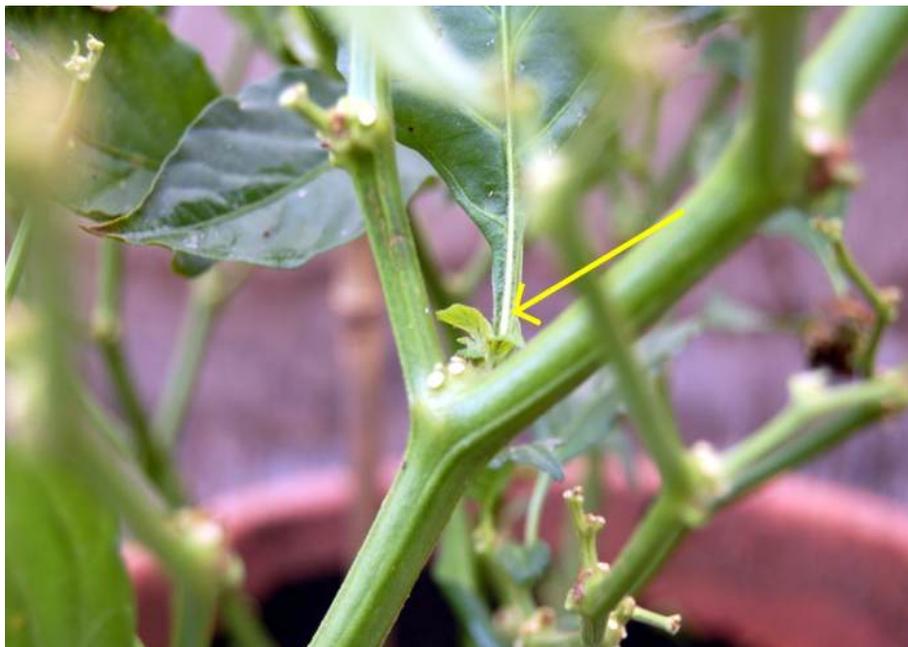
Bengle Naga in pot, ready for overwintering!



- 2) Pick of any remaining pods. These probably wont ripen now. It is almost December. In fact you have a better chance of ripening any green pods indoors on a sunny windowsill (or use the banana trick!)



- 3) So the next step is to give the plant a good haircut. It looks rather cruel when you have finished but it is done so that the plant can concentrate on its roots rather than trying to grow new pods on old stems or maintain foliage.
Before you cut anything, look for signs of new growth at the bottom of the stems.





- 4) The next stage is to cut back the old stems. Dont cut right back to the new growth. Leave an inch or so above any new leaves.



Continue around the rest of the plant.



If you see any brown or decaying stems, remove below the problem



Try to preserve any “v” shaped sections. Try to preserve these, so the plant has two directions to sprout from as it develops new leaves.



- 5) Once you have finished cutting back the stems, your plant will resemble something like this... Remove any old leaves which may have dropped during the pruning process.



- 6) The next stage is to add organic material and to give the plant a final watering. In the winter you still need to water your plants but a lot less than in the summer. Once every 2-3 weeks will be enough (depending where you are keeping them)



- 7) We will be overwintering our plants in our inner tent in the polytunnel, so the next stage is to cover the pot with some bubblewrap insulation. This gives the rootball some added protection against frosts. Make sure to bubblewrap underneath the pot too



- 8) To protect against sharp frosts, we keep our overwintering plants in an inner tent constructed of bubblewrap sheets which is inside our main tunnel. We raise the plants up. We don't want them on the ground and cover any exposed metal shelving with capillary matting. On a really cold day, we heat the inner tent using a plant pot heater. Just make sure to keep it well away from the bubblewrap.
- If you can, we would recommend overwintering your chilli plants INDOORS. We simply do not have the space!



- 9) Finally on a really cold night (or day depending on the temperature), we will also use fleecing to give an added level of protection to the stems. If frost gets into the stems, that is usually pretty terminal for any plant, never mind a chilli. However we do not recommend covering the plants entirely with fleece throughout the winter. This can lead to rot, diseases and also not give the plant chance to adapt to conditions.



We hope this little guide helps. If you have any questions about growing chillies, we will do our best to answer them.

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