UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

SP-215

# Pepper Production Guide for Florida: Cultural Practices[1]

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## Soil Preparation

The field should be plowed to bury old crop refuse. This reduces disease organism carryover. A soil test should be conducted to determine lime and fertilizer requirements. Lime, if required, is applied and incorporated followed by fumigating, fertilizing, and bedding. Bedding can be accomplished with various tools including a bed press, bedding disk, or a double disc hiller followed by a board to level the bed tops. The bed press should be used where plastic mulch will be laid.

## Mulches

Various types of mulches are available for use, depending on the season (Figure 1). Advantages of using plastic mulches include increased early and total yield, improved weed control, improved moisture conservation, better fertilizer conservation, and better fruit quality. Generally, black polyethylene mulch is used except for plantings made in the fall when temperatures are high. The use of white or white-on-black mulch is recommended for early fall plantings to reduce high bed surface temperatures that might desicate young seedlings. Silver mulches or other highly reflective mulches might have usefulness in reducing aphid populations, at least early in the season before plants become large enough to cover the mulch.

**Figure 1.** Raised, mulched beds ready for transplanting of peppers.

## Windbreaks

An often-overlooked crop protection aid is that of crop windbreaks. Several windbreak crops are available to Florida pepper growers including sugar cane, rye, and sometimes oats. Care should be taken to choose a windbreak crop that is adapted to a specific growing region. Pepper cropping patterns often dictate how close the windbreaks will be placed to each other. However, in general, close windbreaks, even between every bed, give the best wind protection and might provide some moderation of the plant's micro-environment, promoting faster crop development.

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Establishment of a windbreak crop the previous fall will ensure enough growth to become effective as a windbreak by spring pepper planting time. Pepper beds can be established in the windbreak crop by rototilling the bed area.

On seep-irrigated land, the windbreaks are usually planted on the field-ditch banks, but also can be planted in the crop harvesting roadways. When the windbreak is removed, ensure that this plant material does not clog ditches. Cereal crop windbreaks between beds can be removed by rototilling.