



Welcome

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. ... How many peppers did Peter Piper pick?

I recited this rhyme often as we played jump rope in the schoolyard. I guess I was destined to fall in love with peppers for all their colors, flavors, and spicy heat.

With thousands of beautiful peppers in the world, Peter could have had a pretty amazing collection. They range from the sweet bell peppers in a myriad of colors that are common in everyone's garden to the exotic hot chilies that can make you sweat, spark your palate, and bring a tear to your eye. Originating from North, Central, and South Americas, peppers have become an important commodity around the world.

Peppers have many uses. We enjoy eating them in sweet and savory dishes, and have presented several recipes in this FoodBook. We benefit from the healthy components of peppers by consuming them in food or applying a topical cream made from them for pain relief. Sprinkled around the garden, hot pepper powder can deter bugs as well as bunnies, squirrels, dogs, and cats. In the form of pepper spray, we can even use them for self-defense!

So pick a pepper or two at your local farmers market. Make a salad or a pickle ... or just add one to your favorite dish to spice up your life a bit. You might just want to pick a peck of them!

Good eating and good touring!

Patricia Lehnhardt
Great Galena Cookery, Galena, Illinois



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Primary author and all recipes by Patricia Lehnhardt
Booklet design by Sheila Barnes
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What Is a Pepper? *Capsicum* spp.

Known and loved around the world, peppers are native to the Americas. Columbus discovered the chili pepper when he was searching for the Spice Islands. He and Magellan spread chilies to Southeast Asia, Europe, and Africa, where they have become an important part of world cuisine.

Capsicum annuum is the most widely grown pepper around the world. It includes the common bell peppers as well as the hot jalapeño, serrano, poblano, and many more. Some other species include *Capsicum baccatum*—known as aji pepper from South America; *Capsicum frutescens*—tabasco chilies, Thai pepper, piri piri; *Capsicum chinense*—includes some of the hottest peppers: Scotch bonnet, habanero, and the Indian “ghost chili,” bhut jolokia; and *Capsicum pubescens*—the rocoto pepper.

Pepper Potpourri

Peppers sometimes change their names. When poblano peppers are dried, they are called ancho peppers. When jalapeño peppers are smoked, they are called chipotle peppers.

Peppers are rated on the Scoville scale for hotness, a system developed by Wilbur Scoville in 1912. Test subjects tasted chilies in sugar water and decided how much more sugar water it took before the heat was gone. Now they use high-tech machinery to test the capsaicin levels in individual peppers. The range is from 0 in a bell pepper, 2,000–4,000 for a jalapeño, 100,000–300,000 for habanero, to over 800,000 in the hottest known pepper, bhut jolokia!

Chili peppers became so popular around the world because they were an inexpensive substitute for the costly black peppercorn, which only grew in Asia. Capsicums can be grown almost everywhere.

Capsaicin is the compound that makes peppers hot. It can cause severe burning of your skin, so wear gloves, wash carefully, and do not touch your eyes, mouth, or sensitive areas. Milk protein, casein, is the most effective counter to consuming too much capsaicin. Drinking milk, eating cheese, sour cream, or yogurt will sooth a burning mouth.

Peppers belong to the nightshade family, Solanaceae. Relatives include tomatoes, eggplant, and potatoes.

In New Mexico there is debate over which is the best sauce—red or green chili. The red kind uses reconstituted dried red chilies in the sauce. Green sauce is made from fresh green chilies that are roasted, peeled, and chopped.