

HOT CHILI PEPPER



PEPPERS belong to the same family as tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant and tomatillo. Hot peppers are green when young and turn red as they ripen. A substance called capsaicin causes peppers to be hot. Capsaicin is soluble in milk and alcohol, but not in water. If you eat a pepper that is too hot for your taste, drinking water will not help. Try drinking milk to ease the painful sensation. Hot peppers are available in the Northeast in the summer and early fall months. Hot peppers vary in intensity depending on the type.



STORAGE

- ◆ Store hot peppers in a cool dry place for 1-2 weeks.
- ◆ **To freeze**, wash and dry, cut into chunks, and place in freezer bags or airtight containers in the freezer.
- ◆ **To dry** hot peppers, cut 1/2 inch slices and gently heat in an oven at 175-200°F for 2-3 hours. Store in a well ventilated place.

PREPARATION

- ◆ **Be very careful** when preparing hot peppers. It is best to wear rubber gloves when chopping or handling them. Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth after you have cut a hot pepper because the capsaicin in the pepper will cause burning and irritation. Make sure to wash your hands thoroughly after handling.
- ◆ **The seeds and inner ribs of the hot pepper are the most intense parts.** Leave them in to prepare a really hot dish or remove those parts to reduce the hotness.
- ◆ **Removing the skin allows the full flavor to come through.** Skins are easily removed after roasting or grilling.
- ◆ **To roast peppers**, place them on a baking sheet with aluminum foil. Bake at 400°F for 20-25 minutes, or until the skin is brown and bubbly. Let stand for 20-30 minutes. After cooling, slice lengthwise and remove the stem, skin, and ribs.
- ◆ Peppers can also be roasted on the grill or even over the flame of a gas stove. Turn with tongs frequently until the skin blisters and can be easily peeled away.

Nutritional Information

Peppers are very high in Vitamin C. Vitamin C is important in immune response, wound healing, and allergic reactions. Vitamin C also helps with iron absorption. Peppers also have moderate to high levels of Vitamin A depending on ripeness. The riper the pepper, the more Vitamin A it has. Vitamin A is important for vision, bone development, and healthy skin.

Hot Chili Pepper Recipes

Hash Brown Potatoes with Cheese and Chilies

- 1 ½ pounds Russet potatoes
 - ½ cup minced onion
 - 3 Tablespoons vegetable oil
 - 3 Tablespoons roasted green chilies, chopped*
 - 3 - 4 scallions chopped
 - ½ to 1 cup grated cheese (Cheddar, Monterrey Jack)
 - Salt and ground pepper
- (* To roast chiles, place them in a heavy cast-iron pan and cook until soft and slightly charred. Wait for them to cool before chopping)



In large pot, cover potatoes with cold water, boil until nearly tender, drain. When cool, remove skins and grate coarsely into large bowl. Mix in onion. In medium skillet, heat oil add potatoes, chilies and scallions. Stir and cook until lightly browned. Add cheese and season with salt and pepper, lower the heat, and keep stirring every few minutes until browned all over.

Recipe adapted from Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone by Debra Madison, copyright 1997 by Broadway Books.

Melon and Bell Pepper Salsa

- 1 pound watermelon, rinds and seeds removed, and then diced
- 1 pound cantaloupe or honeydew, rinds and seeds removed, and then diced
- ½ red or green bell pepper, diced
- ½ small sweet onion, finely chopped
- ⅓ cup packed fresh cilantro, finely chopped
- ½ fresh jalapeño chili, with seeds
- 2 Tablespoons chopped fresh mint leaves
- 1 Tablespoon fresh lime juice



Wearing rubber gloves, finely chop jalapeno but do not remove seeds. In a bowl, toss all ingredients season with salt. Makes about 4 cups. Serve with chicken and fish dishes, with cheese quesidillas or as a dip for tortilla chips.

Recipe adapted from Gourmet, July 1998, copyright 1998 by Condé Nast Inc.

Mexican Chile Relish

- 8 ounces (about 13) jalapeño chilies, washed and dried well
- 1 medium white onion, sliced thinly
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- salt to taste
- ½ teaspoon dried Mexican oregano
- ¾ cup white wine vinegar or other mild vinegar
- ¼ cup canola oil



Remove the stems from the chilies and cut them in half lengthwise. Remove the seeds and cut each chili into four strips. In medium bowl, combine chili with other ingredients. Set aside at least 2 hours. Serve with broiled meats, rice, or beans. Makes about 2 cups.

Recipe adapted from The Essential Cuisines of Mexico by Diana Kennedy, copyright 2000 by Clarkson Potter.