

Did You Know?



Chile Peppers, *Capsicum* spp.

- Chile peppers have been cultivated for over 7000 years.
- While they originated in South and Central America, chiles were quickly spread throughout the world following the travels of Christopher Columbus.
- Birds were responsible, at least in part, for the spread of the seed throughout the Americas, being unaffected by the capsaicinoids.
- The chile pepper is not at all related to black pepper *Piper nigrum*.
- Historically, chile peppers have been used as money, tribute, spice, ornament, vegetable, medicine, as pest control and in spiritual ceremonies.
- The sweet pepper is not naturally occurring but rather bred to be absent of heat.
- There are more than 10,000 varieties of chile peppers in the world.
- Pepper hotness is measured by the Scoville Heat Unit System, invented by Wilbur L. Scoville in 1912. It rates how much capsaicin or heat is present in a pepper.
- Laboratory techniques rather than tasters are now used to determine the hotness of a pepper.
- Just one drop of pure capsaicin, registering over 15 million Scoville units, diluted in 100,000 drops of water would be enough to blister your skin.
- Milk offers relief from the heat since it contains a fat-dissolving substance that neutralizes capsaicin.
- Pepper spray is made from a derivative of cayenne pepper.
- Capsaicin is an odorless tasteless antioxidant occurring naturally in plants from the genus *Capsicum* and is the chemical component that causes the heat in chile peppers.
- As little 1 tablespoon of red or green chile pepper can boost an individual's metabolic rate.
- Capsaicin is used in topical pain relievers.
- Research is currently being conducted to study the impact of capsaicin on cancer cells.
- One fresh medium sized green chile pod has as much Vitamin C as six oranges according to the Chile Pepper Institute.

Chile Peppers, *Capsicum* spp.

- Peppers are a member of the *Solanaceae* or nightshade family, along with tomatoes, potatoes, eggplants and tomatillos.
- Only 5 species in the genus *Capsicum* are cultivated and include both hot and sweet peppers.
- *Capsicum annuum* (annual, though is perennial in native habitat) – the most widely grown species which includes sweet bell, jalapeno and New Mexican
- *C. baccatum* (berry like) – some varieties have very large fruit and the plants are very tall, up to 5’
- *C. chinense* (though this species originated in the Amazon basin of Brazil) – includes ‘Habaneros’
- *C. frutescens* (shrubby) – includes ‘Tabasco’ peppers
- *C. pubescens* (hairy) – includes ‘Rocotos’ from South America and ‘Manzanas’ from Mexico; adapted to cooler growing conditions and need a longer growing season
- Pepper plants vary in growth habit and size.
- Fruit set occurs when daytime temperatures don’t exceed 95°F and nights range from 55 to 80°F.
- When selecting a species and variety, be sure to consider the characteristics that match your climate and growing conditions such as early vs. late maturing varieties, number of days to maturity, and disease resistance.
- Select a growing space in full sun with well-drained loam or sandy loam soil.
- Soil pH should ideally range from 6.7 to 7.3.
- Save seeds only from mature fruits, never the green ones, remove the extraneous pieces of the pod and dry thoroughly before saving in a sealed moisture-proof container.