

PEPPERS Science Page

DID YOU KNOW?

When Christopher Columbus set out for the New World, he hoped to find black pepper, a spice that grew in Asia. Instead he found the Arawak Indians eating another plant that was spicy, but not related to black pepper. He called it "red pepper" because it had red pods.



ORIGINS

Peppers are native to South America. People there ate wild peppers nearly 10,000 years ago, and farmers began growing the plant over 7,000 years ago.



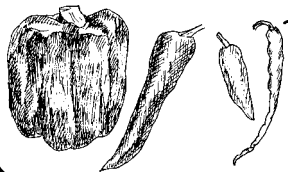
THE PEPPER PLANT

In temperate climates, pepper plants last only one growing season. In tropical areas, they are woody shrubs that grow from year to year.

Pepper plants have pointed leaves and small, star-shaped flowers.



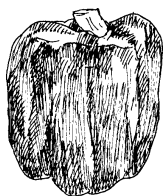
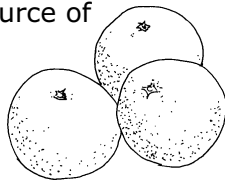
The fruits come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors.



NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF PEPPERS

Peppers are an excellent source of vitamins A and C.

As green pods turn red, the vitamin content increases. One red bell pepper has ...



... the same amount of vitamin C as 3 oranges.

... the same amount of vitamin A as 1/3 of a carrot.



CLASSIFYING PEPPERS

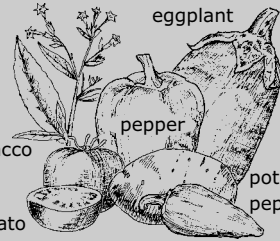
FAMILY

Solanaceae

The Latin name "solanum" means "nightshade."



deadly nightshade



eggplant

pepper

tobacco

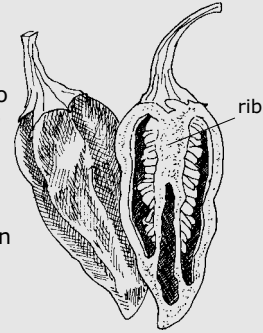
tomato

potato pepper

GENUS

Capsicum

This name comes from the Greek word "kapto" meaning to bite. Hot peppers have a taste that bites your mouth!

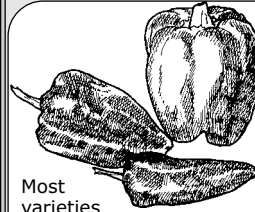


rib

The heat in hot pepper is from capsaicin, a substance mostly found in the tip of the fruit, in the ribs, and in the seeds.

SPECIES

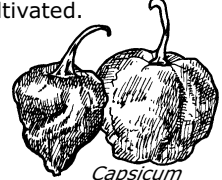
Three capsicum species are widely cultivated.



Most varieties belong to the species *Capsicum annum*.



Capsicum frutescens



Capsicum chinense

GROWING AND HARVESTING PEPPERS

Peppers thrive in well-drained, fertile soil. They must have a constant supply of water in order to set fruit.



These peppers are ripe and full of flavor. I'll leave the green peppers on the plant until they ripen fully and turn red, yellow, and orange.

USES

Peppers are used raw in salads or in cooking. They can be used fresh or dried, whole or ground into spices. The capsaicin in hot peppers is also used in medicine.

Paprika is a spice that is made from any dried red pepper that is not hot.



Fresh, dried, whole or crushed, cayenne peppers are used in fiery dishes in many parts of the world.

