

# Did You Know?

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## History and Fun Facts

- 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.

## Health

- 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.

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## Culture

- 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.