PACIFIC COAST FARMERS' MARKET ASSOCIATION

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TURN UP THE HEAT! HOT PEPPERS

Are you one of those people who like peppers so hot they make your eyes water, your throat close, and your hands shake? Then Thai chili peppers, habanero peppers, or even the infamous ghost pepper will have you reaching for the milk. Stop by your local farmers' market for a wide selection of hot peppers. They have everything from mildly warm to 5-alarm, blistering hot peppers during the summer months.

Call them chili peppers or hot peppers, they come in lots of varieties, with many only found at your farmers' market. The heat you feel from eating a hot pepper is determined by the amount of capsaicin in the pepper. These levels of capsaicin are measured on the Scoville scale to determine how hot you can expect a pepper to be. Developed by Wilbur Scoville in 1912, Scoville Units measure pepper heat in multiples of 100.

Bell peppers and sweet Italian peppers stand at zero, jalapeños at 5,000, cayenne peppers at 50,000, and habanero peppers at 300,000 units. Thai chili peppers that have names like Volcano and Scorpion come in at 115,000 Scoville units. With new hotter varieties of habaneros named Carolina Reaper, Devil's Tongue, and Komodo Dragon at over 1.4 million Scovilles, you know they're going to make you sweat!

What is the hottest part of the pepper? There are many who say the seeds are what makes a pepper hot. Others say it's the white pith inside that's the hottest – these folks are correct. The inner wall of the pepper is what gives the pepper its heat, not the seeds, which only contain a small amount of capsaicin. If you want the

taste of pepper flavor while avoiding most of the hotness, remove the pithy inner wall of the pepper.

Finally, the amount of heat in a pepper depends on when the pepper is harvested during the growth cycle. Peppers that are harvested while still green have less heat, while those harvested when they have begun to ripen to a red, orange, or golden color are hotter. Even hotter are peppers that have been left to fully ripen on the vine.

Try these easy ways to prepare and enjoy peppers to fire up your taste buds:

1. Stuff jalapeños with cream cheese and herbs, top with shredded cheddar, and broil.
2. Add chopped and seeded jalapeños to your cornbread for an extra zip.
3. Add finely chopped habaneros to your 5-alarm chili recipe.
4. Stir fry vegetables with pork or chicken. Add Thai peppers*. Kung Pao chicken, anyone?
5. Add finely chopped habanero* peppers for homemade pepper jelly. Serve with a cream cheese block.
   *Use a milder pepper for a not-so-spicy version.

*When preparing very hot peppers like habanero or ghost, it is wise to use gloves and eye shields when working with them. We're not kidding! It's also advisable to open windows or put on a fan. Do NOT put your hands in your eyes and thoroughly wash your hands when you're finished.

Now that you're ready to cook with delicious, hot, chili peppers, stop by your farmers' market and pick up some Thai peppers, jalapeños, or habaneros and ask your farmer how to prepare and cook with them. See how hot you can go! Visit Bautista Ranch in Stockton, Franklin Thor Farm from Fresno, Borba Farms in Aromas, and many other farms at your local farmers' market.

TAGS

peppers, hot