Selecting, Storing, and Serving Ohio Peppers

Peppers are a vegetable used in a variety of dishes as seasoning, garnish, main dish, and relish, and even raw in a vegetable dip. Peppers are native to tropical America and were grown by Native Americans in North and South America over 2,000 years ago. Small hot peppers were discovered by Columbus in the West Indies and introduced into Europe where they became popular before gaining acceptance in the United States.

Peppers come in a variety of shapes, colors, sweetness, and “hotness.” Some sweet pepper varieties are bell, pimiento, sweet banana, and sweet cherry. “Hot” varieties are cayenne, chili, jalapeño, Hungarian, Serrano, and some cherry varieties. Peppers are available from mid-July through September.

For information on pepper varieties in Ohio, contact your county Extension educator, Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Selection
Choose peppers that are firm, crisp, fresh, and brightly colored. They should be thick-fleshed and either bright green or with more or less red. Avoid peppers with pale green skins and those that are overripe, bruised, blistered, or soft, which shows immaturity.

Storage
Store green peppers in the refrigerator crisper at 46–48 degrees F for no longer than 2 weeks.

Yield
Due to many variables, including moisture content, size, and variety, it is impossible to give specific recommendations as to quantity to buy. The recommendations below are approximations only.
- 1 bushel = 25 pounds peppers
- 1 bushel = 17–21 quarts canned
- 1 quart = 1 1/3 pounds

Nutrition
The “Dietary Guidelines for Americans” recommend that adults need 2–2 1/2 cups of a variety of vegetables daily for good nutrition. Peppers can help to meet these nutritional requirements. Bell peppers are an excellent source of Vitamin C and have antioxidants to prevent cancer and fight heart disease. Red, orange, and bright yellow peppers provide some Vitamin C and A. Peppers are high in fiber. One large green pepper has 22 calories.
Safe Handling

Clean surfaces, utensils, and hands after touching raw meat and poultry and before you use them on fresh produce. To remove dirt, wash vegetables thoroughly in cold water. Drain and rinse several times with cold water. Do not use soap, detergent, or bleach as it can be absorbed into the vegetable. Lift vegetables from water to prevent redepositing of dirt and residues. Use a soft brush on peppers if needed. To prepare, cut a thin slice from the stem end. Remove seeds and fibrous portion. Wash inside.

Serving

**Hot peppers and pimientos:** Thin, tough skins can be removed by one of the following methods:

1. Heat in a single layer on baking sheet in 425°F oven until skins blister. Remove and steam in wet towel and plastic bag for 15 minutes. Peel and rinse.
2. Scald in boiling water 1–5 minutes until skins can be peeled. **CAUTION:** To prevent burning hands, wear rubber gloves when handling hot peppers. Do not touch face or hands. Remove stems and seeds.

Serving Ideas

- Serve raw in salad or with dip.
- Use in soups or stews, stir-fries, and casseroles.
- Stuff whole with a meat/rice mixture and bake.
- Fry pepper slices or rings in small amount of olive oil 3 to 5 minutes or until crisp, tender, and light brown.

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