



## Hot Peppers - Preserving the Heat!

Hot peppers have been receiving a lot of attention as a popular ingredient to “heat” up a favorite dish. Just like the traditional bell pepper, hot peppers can be preserved in a number of ways.

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The mildest peppers are bell and pimiento peppers; banana and cherry peppers are also in this category. The traditional hot pepper is the jalapeno, but newer varieties have been recognized with pepper connoisseurs seeking out the so-called “ghost” pepper and other extremely hot peppers. In the middle are serrano, red cayenne and yellow hot wax peppers.

### Measuring the

### Heat

The pungency of peppers is measured in **Scoville heat units** (SHU) which indicate the amount of capsaicin present. The higher the Scoville rating, the hotter the pepper. The scale starts at 0, the measure of heat in a bell pepper.

- A jalapeno measures between 2,500 to 8,000 SHU.
- A habanero ranges from 100,000 to 350,000 SHU.
- Bhut Jolokia, known as the ghost pepper, hits the 1 million mark.

- Generally, small peppers contain more heat than larger peppers.

**Capsaicin, the chemical in peppers that make them hot, is concentrated in the membranes and seeds. The concentration of heat in a recipe can be adjusted by removing some or all the seeds and/or membranes.**

**Caution: Wear gloves when working with hot peppers to keep the capsaicin oil away from your eyes and sensitive areas. Glasses are also a good protection. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before touching your face.**

## Preserving Hot Peppers

Penn State Extension [Let's Preserve Peppers](#) provides preservation guidelines for canning and freezing peppers, both hot and mild.

**Other tips when it comes to hot peppers:**

### Freezing

- Whole hot peppers can be frozen raw after they are washed, and stems are removed.

### Canning

- Peppers are a low acid food. Unless pickled in vinegar, they must be processed in a pressure canner.

### Pickled Peppers and Relishes

- One variety of pepper can be substituted for another in a pickle or relish recipe.
- For a milder flavor substitute bell peppers for hot peppers. For safety, keep the total amount the same.
- It is safe to reduce the amount of a low acid vegetable such as pepper or onion in a recipe, but never add more in relation to the amount of pickling solution.

### Drying

**Dehydrating peppers in a home dehydrator removes moisture quickly and under controlled conditions.**

- Cut peppers into  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch pieces or slices. Blanching is not needed. Place on mesh lined dryer trays. (Use mesh to prevent pieces falling through the tray.)
- Start dryer at 140°F for 2 hours and decrease temperature to 130°F until dry. They are dry when they are tough to brittle.

**Air drying is possible with good air circulation if the humidity is low.**

- To air dry small hot peppers, slit them with a knife. Then use a large needle to run a heavy thread through the stems of the peppers. Hang the strings of peppers in a room where the air circulates freely. It may take 3 to 4 weeks for strings of peppers to dry. High humidity can cause the peppers to spoil before they dry.
- [Sun drying](#) requires low humidity and daytime temperatures higher than 85°F. This method is generally not satisfactory in Pennsylvania.

## **Additional Tips:**

- Store dried peppers in an airtight container in a dark, cool place.
- Exposure to light causes dried peppers to fade quickly.
- Dried peppers stored in the refrigerator or freezer will retain their color best.
- The skins of large pieces of rehydrated peppers tend to be tough. Reduce this problem by chopping or grinding peppers to a powder in a blender. Use to season stews, soups, dips, and other dishes.
- Make cayenne pepper or chili powder by blending dried hot pepper pods to a powder.