



BELL (SWEET) PEPPERS

Description

Peppers are thick-fleshed fruits with a smooth, waxy skin and a crunchy texture. Bell peppers contain a recessive gene that prevents capaicin (the compound that makes hot peppers hot) from being produced, so they lack the spiciness that many other varieties of peppers have, and are often called “sweet peppers.” They are crisp and refreshing raw, and pleasantly assertive when cooked to tenderness.

Recipe

Stuffed Green Peppers

- 6-8 large green peppers
- 1 lb ground beef
- 1/2 onion diced
- 1 bag shredded mozzarella
- 2 medium cans tomato sauce
- 2 cups rice

Wash green peppers, cut off top and scoop out insides carefully without poking through the pepper. Set aside. Cook rice as usual. Brown the ground beef and onion in a skillet, drain off grease and add tomato sauce (leaving some to cover bottom of cooking dish).

Add cooked rice to meat mixture and stir together well. Place some mozzarella in bottom of green peppers and then spoon in meat mixture, packing down carefully until filled. Sprinkle mozzarella on top.

Bake at 375°F in a covered roasting pan or baking dish with foil over top until green pepper is slightly soft. Olives may also be placed inside with meat mixture, if desired.

Varieties

The color can be green, red, yellow, orange and, more rarely, white, purple, blue, and brown, depending on when they are harvested and the specific variety. Green peppers are unripe bell peppers, while the others are all ripe, with the color variation based on variety selection. Because they are unripe, green peppers are less sweet and slightly more bitter than yellow, orange, or red peppers. The taste of ripe peppers can also vary with growing conditions and post-harvest storage treatment; the sweetest are fruit allowed to ripen fully on the plant in full sunshine, while fruit harvested green and after-ripened in storage are less sweet.

Nutrient Content

Bell peppers are a great source of vitamin C. Green bell peppers have 2x the vitamin C by weight than citrus fruits (oranges, lemons etc.) and Red bell peppers have 3x what the green bell varieties have. They are also rich in fiber and vitamin A.

Uses

Most varieties of peppers can be eaten either raw or cooked. Sweet peppers frequently are julienned or chopped and added raw to salads or cooked in soups, stews, and stir-fries. They also can be roasted (which makes it easy to remove the skin and adds smoky flavor) and marinated, or they may be stuffed and baked or microwaved.

Availability

Green peppers are grown in almost every state in the United States and are abundantly available year-round. Their season peaks between July and November. Red peppers are generally more expensive because the yield is lower from each plant. However, they are more abundant and, consequently, less expensive toward the end of the green pepper season.

Origin

Different varieties of bell peppers have been cultivated in the Americas long before the arrival of the Europeans, probably originating in the area bordering Southern Brazil and Bolivia. Thence, the species moved to the North, being dispersed by birds. Pepper seeds were carried to Spain in 1493 and from there spread to other European and Asian countries. In the U.S., sweet peppers constitute more than 60% of the pepper crop. The leading domestic growers of peppers are California and Florida.