

SWEET PEPPERS



Dishes that are brilliantly colored with sweet peppers are hard to resist. Not only are they a feast for the eyes, but they are delicious and nutritious

too. You can enjoy peppers raw in salads, cooked into hot dishes, or transform their juicy crisp taste into a mellow smoky flavor by roasting them.

Although all peppers are very nutritious, red peppers certainly stand out for their abundance of protective phytochemicals. Red peppers are actually green peppers that have ripened on the vine, becoming sweeter and more nutritious as the green changes to a vibrant red. For example, although green peppers are a good source of vitamin C, red peppers contain almost twice as much, with one medium red pepper supplying more than double the amount of vitamin C found in a medium orange. As for the potential cancer fighter beta-carotene, red peppers boast about 10 times the amount found in green peppers. Yellow and orange peppers also feature protective nutrients, with yellow peppers boasting slightly higher amounts of folate than other peppers, and orange peppers providing the carotenoid zeaxanthin.

SELECTING, STORING, AND PREPARING

LOOK FOR peppers that are firm and well shaped with smooth skin that has no soft spots. Thick walled peppers that are heavy for their size will be the juiciest.

STORE unwashed peppers in a plastic bag in your refrigerator, where they should keep for about a week.

PREPARING. Use a sharp paring knife to prepare peppers. Rinse in cold water, then slice off the top and bottom of the pepper. Cut pepper lengthwise on one side, then open the pepper flat. Run a knife sideways along pepper to remove ribs and seeds from the inside. Slice into strips or dice as required by recipe.

Roasted Peppers

Roasted bell peppers are dramatically different from their fresh counterparts. They have a sweet smoky flavor and silky texture, and are terrific in pastas, dips, soups, and sauces. Roasted peppers also add a wonderful taste and color to sandwiches, fish, chicken, and egg dishes. Commercial roasted red peppers are widely available, but you might consider roasting your own as outlined here by foodfit.com:

1. Slice pepper in half lengthwise and remove the seeds.
2. Place pepper halves on a cookie sheet and press down so they lie flat with the skin side up.
3. Place the pepper under a hot broiler until the skin is evenly blistered, about 5 to 8 minutes.
4. Carefully remove the pepper from the cookie sheet and place in a bowl.
5. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and let sit for 5 minutes.
6. Uncover and peel off the skin.

Enjoy immediately, store in refrigerator, or freeze for later use.

RED, YELLOW, and ORANGE peppers are more expensive than GREEN PEPPERS because they must be cared for for so much longer before harvest and they have less yield per plant.

Serving Ideas

Super Quick Peppers



You can enjoy colorful sweet peppers any time without effort if you keep frozen pepper strips in your freezer. They are widely available and are terrific in most soups, stews, or sauces. Just pour out the amount you need and return the remainder to the freezer. Jarred roasted red peppers are also a great time saver.

Stuffed Peppers

Large bell peppers are nature's perfect container. Cut the stem end off, discard the core and seeds, and stuff the pepper with chili, seasoned rice, or vegetables, and bake.

Super Sauce

Puree roasted red bell peppers with onion, herbs, and garlic to make a flavorful sauce for pasta or poultry.

Juice

Juicing peppers is a great way to add more of this antioxidant-rich vegetable to your diet. For the best flavor, mix peppers with another vegetable. For example, juice two green or red bell peppers with four or five carrots for a refreshing beverage that's rich in protective phytochemicals.

Greek Bell Pepper Salad

Chop two peppers, one cucumber, and two tomatoes into ½-inch pieces and combine. Garnish with kalamata olives, finely sliced red onion rings, and feta cheese. For the dressing, combine 1 tbsp. each of olive oil, balsamic vinegar, and water with 1 tsp. each of maple syrup, dried basil, and dried oregano.

Pepper Pointers

Peppers are so versatile that you can enjoy them raw, grilled, baked, or stir fried. Here are a few ideas:

- Add sweetness and crunch to pasta, tuna, or salmon salad with diced peppers.
- Boost the nutrition of a bean burrito by adding freshly diced peppers. Olé!

CUBAN BLACK BEANS

Serve over brown rice or your favorite whole grain or with fresh cornbread. This is also good served with salsa fresca. Leftover beans can be frozen.

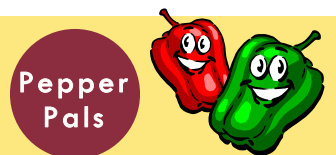
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|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 | <i>tbsp. olive oil</i> | 1. | Saute onions, carrots, red peppers, cumin, and paprika in olive oil for approximately 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. |
| 1 | <i>lg. onion, chopped (about 2 cups)</i> | 2. | Stir in beans. |
| 3 | <i>lg. carrots, finely chopped or coarsely grated (about 2 cups)</i> | 3. | Add parsley (or cilantro) and V8 juice. |
| 1 | <i>12-oz jar roasted red peppers, chopped</i> | 4. | Simmer another 10 minutes. You may want to cover to maintain moisture and avoid burning. |
| 1 | <i>tbsp. cumin</i> | | |
| 1 | <i>tbsp. paprika</i> | | |
| 3 | <i>15-oz cans black beans, rinsed</i> | | |
| ½ | <i>cup parsley or cilantro, chopped</i> | | |
| 1 | <i>11.5 ounce can V8 juice salt and pepper to taste</i> | | |



To add an authentic Cuban flair, top with chopped onions and chopped cilantro that have been tossed with balsamic vinegar. Consider splashing in a little seasoned rum (about ¼ cup) and fresh lime juice (about ¼ cup) right before serving. You may substitute fresh chopped peppers for the roasted red peppers, but simmer for 5 more minutes before serving.

MAKES EIGHT 1-CUP SERVINGS.

PER SERVING: 220 calories, 11 g protein, 35 g carbohydrates, 4 g fat (<1 g sat)
0 mg cholesterol, 9 g fiber, 545 mg sodium, 650 mg potassium, and 110 mg calcium.
Count each serving as 1 ½ Vegetable Servings and 1 Beans/Legumes Serving.



Sweet peppers taste great with eggplant, tomatoes, summer squash, onions, garlic, or corn.

Fresh herbs like basil or marjoram enhance their flavor.

Other good flavor partners include vinegar, capers, olives, mozzarella, goat cheese, and Parmesan.

