



CAPSICUM

Sweet Pepper-*Capsicum annuum*

Tabasco Pepper-*Capsicum frutescens*

Chilli Pepper-*Capsicum chinense*



INTERNATIONAL HERB OF THE YEAR 2016

Family –Solanaceae

Common Names

Sweet pepper, chilli pepper, red pepper, cayenne pepper, habanero

Description

Capsicum annuum:

This annual or biennial herb is grown commercially in the tropics or subtropics. In New Zealand it is grown as a summer annual. The plant grows 30cm – 1m high with oval, pointed leaves and white flowers in summer. The fleshy edible fruit and furrowed sides and vary in colour (yellow, brown, purple, bright red) when mature. When unripe the fruit is green but still edible. Most cultivars are referred to as ‘sweet peppers’. They do not contain the alkaloid capsaicin. Peppers belong to the same family as potatoes and tomatoes.

Paprika Pepper:

A hardier variety of *Capsicum annuum* this pepper is commercially grown for its fruit. Harvested and dried the fruit is crushed as paprika powder. It has a sweet mild flavour and should be brilliant red; if brown in colour it is probably stale. Paprika is high in Vitamin C and is used generously in stews and meat dishes.

Tabasco, Cayenne & Chilli Peppers:

Grow as a perennial shrub in tropics or subtropics but are regarded as annual summer growing herbs elsewhere. Eventually growing between 60cm-2m tall the woody stems have elliptical leaves and star-like white flowers with yellow centres which appear in summer. Small, leathery, pods containing numerous pungent seeds develop in various shades of red and yellow and can be harvested through to autumn. Fruit can be used fresh, dried or powdered.

Cultivation

Grow under glass in a sunny position in rich soil. Avoid extremes in temperature. Sow seed in Spring under glass. Transfer to pots and continue to grow under shelter until all danger of frost is past. A sunny, sheltered spot with plenty of compost and fertile soil is needed. Sweet peppers do not contain the compound capsaicin which is the heat sensation of chilli and Tabasco varieties. Seeds of peppers can be eaten. They do have a higher concentration of capsaicin and recipes often advise the pepper is opened and the seeds removed for this reason.

Uses

Capsicum annuum:

Culinary: eat fruit in salads, as vegetable or add to casseroles and stews.

Medicinal: Fresh or dried fruit is used as a stimulant and digestive. As an infusion at first sign of a chill. Sprinkle ½ teaspoon finely chopped in ½ cup of boiling water or hot milk at the first sign of a chill.

Capsicum frutescens;

Culinary: Pulverize seeds and use hot spice discreetly.

Medicinal: Pods contain Vitamin C and magnesium. They stimulate the circulation and the digestive system and help to ward off colds. Use to relieve colic, flatulence, stomach pains and cramp. Infuse weakly as throat gargle.

Constituents

Capsaicin is the most pungent chemical in the fruit of various species of Capsicum. Internally it is a gastro intestinal stimulant and externally it is a counter irritant which would be the topical pain reliever. Some other constituents include carotenoids, liquid alkaloid, saponin capsidin and a fixed oil. Capsicum contains 0.2 percent ascorbic acid. It is rich in fats, protein and a source of Vitamin A, C and zinc which are vital for a strong and healthy immune system.

References:

Herbalist of MD idea Extracts Professional.
The Complete Book of Herbs – Lesley Bremness
The twenty five herb book – B.Hale & E. Hinds
Encyclopedia of Herbs – Deni Bown