

Strengthening Families

Cumberland County Center

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Bell Peppers

Named for their bell-like shape, bell or sweet peppers are actually a fruit in the same family as tomatoes, potatoes, and eggplant. They come in a variety of colors, including green, red, yellow, orange, purple, white, and brown. Their sweet, mild flavor and crisp, juicy flesh make them a cooking staple. Bell peppers can be stuffed and baked, grilled, roasted, stir-fried, and served in salads, stews, and soups.

Green peppers, the most common and least expensive variety of bell pepper, are picked before they ripen and have a slightly sharper flavor. When left to ripen, green peppers become sweeter and turn red, yellow, or other colors depending on the variety. Red peppers are an excellent source of vitamins A and C. Green peppers are an excellent source of vitamin C.

Select bell peppers that are firm and crisp and that feel heavy for their size. They should be shiny and richly colored. Avoid any that are shriveled or have soft spots. For stuffed peppers, choose rounded, blocked-shaped peppers. Refrigerate unwashed peppers in a plastic bag for up to one week. Red, yellow, and other colored peppers are slightly more perishable than green peppers. Wrap leftover cut peppers in plastic wrap and refrigerate for one to two days.

Rinse bell peppers under cold running water just before using. To

chop or slice, stand the pepper on its end on a cutting board. Cut downward three or four times to form vertical slices. Discard the stem, core, and seeds. Remove the white membranes. Cut the slices into strips or chop as desired.

To cut a pepper into rings or to prepare it for stuffing, make a circular cut around the top of the pepper with a paring knife. Pull out and discard the stem, core, and seeds. Carefully cut out the membranes, and rinse with water to remove any seeds. Slice crosswise to form rings or leave intact for stuffing.

Roasting peppers gives them an intensely sweet, smoky flavor. To roast peppers, arrange whole peppers on a foil-lined baking sheet. Broil them two to four inches below the heat source, turning with tongs as needed until they are blackened on all sides. Wrap the roasted peppers in the foil from the pan, and place the foil-wrapped peppers in a sealed plastic bag to steam them and loosen the skins. When they're cool enough to handle, peel off and discard the blackened skins. Remove and discard stems, cores, and seeds. Slice and use in sandwiches, salads, dips, spreads, pizza toppings, and pasta dishes.



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Marinated Peppers

(Bell, Hungarian, Banana, Jalapeno)
(about nine (9) half-pint jars)

4 pounds firm peppers
1 cup bottled lemon juice
2 cups white vinegar
1 tablespoon oregano leaves
1 cup olive oil or salad oil
½ cup chopped onions
2 tablespoons prepared horseradish (optional)
2 to 3 cloves garlic, quartered (optional)

Select your favorite pepper.

Wash. Small peppers may be left whole; large ones, quartered.

Slash 2 to 4 slits in each pepper. Peel chile or other tough-skinned peppers according to the directions in “Mexican Tomato Sauce” recipe below. Blanch other peppers for 3 minutes in boiling water. Flatten whole peppers.

Mix lemon juice, vinegar, oregano, oil, onions and horseradish in a saucepan and heat to boiling.

Place ¼ garlic clove in each jar. If desired, add ¼ teaspoon salt to each half-pint jar; ½ teaspoon in each pint. Fill jars with peppers to ½ inch from top. Pour hot, well-mixed oil/pickling solution over peppers, leaving ½-inch head-space. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids. Process half-pints for 15 minutes in a Boiling Water Bath.

Variation - It is possible to adjust the intensity of pickled jalapeno peppers by using all hot jalapeno peppers (hot style) or blending the jalapeno peppers with sweet and mild peppers (medium or mild style).

For hot style - Use 4 pounds jalapeno peppers.

For medium style - Use 2 pounds jalapeno peppers and 2 pounds sweet and mild peppers.

For mild style - Use 1 pound jalapeno peppers and 3 pounds sweet and mild peppers.



Mexican Tomato Sauce (7 quart jars)

2½ to 3 pounds chile peppers
18 pounds tomatoes
3 cups chopped onions
1 tablespoon salt
1 tablespoon oregano
½ cup vinegar



To prepare Chile Peppers - **CAUTION:** Wear rubber gloves while handling chiles or wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before touching your face. Wash and dry chiles. Slit each pepper on its side to allow steam to escape. Peel peppers using one of the following methods:

- Oven or broiler method: Place chiles in oven (400° F) or broiler for 6 to 8 minutes until skins blister.
- Range-top method: Cover hot burner, either gas or electric, with heavy wire mesh. Place chiles on burner for several minutes until skins blister.

Allow peppers to cool. Place in a pan and cover with a damp cloth. This will make peeling the peppers easier. After several minutes, peel each pepper. Remove stem and seeds from peppers.

Hot Pack - Chop peppers. Wash tomatoes and dip in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds until skins split. Dip in cold water, slip off skins and remove core. Coarsely chop tomatoes. Combine chopped tomatoes, peppers and remaining ingredients in large saucepan, bring to a boil. Cover and simmer 10 minutes. Pour into hot jars, leaving 1-inch head-space. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids and process.

Dial Gauge Pressure Canner at 11 pounds pressure **OR** Weighted Gauge Pressure Canner at 10 pounds pressure. **Pints: 20 minutes/Quarts: 25 minutes.**

Pepper Jelly With Liquid Pectin (5 half-pint jars)

4 or 5 hot peppers, cored and cut in pieces
4 sweet green peppers, cored and cut in pieces
1 cup white vinegar
5 cups sugar
1 pouch liquid pectin
Green food coloring

To Make Jelly - Sterilize canning jars. Put half the peppers and half the vinegar into blender container; cover and process at liquefy until pepper is liquefied. Repeat with remaining peppers and vinegar. Combine liquefied peppers/vinegar and sugar in a large saucepot and boil slowly for 10 minutes. Remove from heat. Add liquid pectin and boil hard 1 minute. Skim and add a few drops of green food coloring. Pour jelly immediately into hot canning jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and adjust lids. Process for 5 minutes in a **Boiling Water Bath**.



Freezing Bell Peppers, Sweet Peppers and Hot Peppers

Bell or Sweet Peppers

Preparation - Select crisp, tender, green or bright red pods. Wash, cut out stems, cut in half and remove seeds. If desired, cut into ½-inch strips or rings.

Heated - Good for use in cooking. Water blanch halves 3 minutes, strips or rings for 2 minutes. Cool promptly, drain and package, leaving ½-inch headspace. Seal and freeze.

Unheated - Good for use in uncooked foods because they have a crisper texture. Also good in cooked foods. Package raw, leaving no headspace. Seal and freeze.

Hot Peppers

Preparation - Wash and stem peppers. Package, leaving no headspace. Seal and freeze.



Stuffed Bell Peppers

Ingredients:

6 large green peppers, rinsed	1 teaspoon dried basil
1 pound lean ground beef	1/2 teaspoon salt
1 medium onion, finely chopped	Pepper to taste
1 or 2 cloves garlic, minced	1/3 cup grated Parmesan, plus extra for garnish
1/2 cup long grain white rice	1 large egg, lightly beaten
1 1/4 cups chicken or beef broth	3 cups of tomato sauce
3/4 cup diced tomato (fresh or canned)	
1 teaspoon paprika	
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce	



Instructions:

1. Slice the top 1/4 inch off each pepper. Finely chop the flesh on the stem end; set it aside. Remove the seeds and white membrane from the inside of the peppers. (If the peppers won't stand up straight, take a small slice off the bottom with a paring knife to make a flat surface.)
2. Put a steamer basket (or a colander) inside a large pot and add an inch or so of water. Place the peppers in the basket. Bring the water to a boil and tightly cover the pot. Steam the peppers for 8 minutes. Remove the peppers with tongs and set them on a wire rack to cool.
3. Combine the reserved chopped pepper, ground beef, onion, and garlic in a large skillet. Brown the meat over medium heat for 5 to 6 minutes, breaking it up with a spoon.
4. Drain any visible fat from the pan, then return it to the heat. Add the rice, broth, tomato, paprika, Worcestershire sauce, basil, salt, and pepper. Bring the mixture to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer it, tightly covered, for 18 to 20 minutes, or until the liquid is absorbed. Remove the pan from the heat and let it stand for 15 to 20 minutes. Stir in the egg and 1/3 cup Parmesan.
5. Heat oven to 375°. Lightly oil a large baking dish and pour 1 1/2 cups of tomato sauce into the dish. Using a large spoon, scoop about 3/4 cup of filling into each pepper. Set the stuffed peppers into a prepared pan, so they are evenly spaced and surrounded by sauce. Spread a spoonful of the remaining sauce over the top of each, to keep filling moist, and cover the pan with aluminum foil.
6. Bake the peppers until they're heated through, about 35 minutes. Remove foil and sprinkle tops with Parmesan.

Serves 6