



# BELL PEPPER TALKING POINTS

## 2. A Slice of Pepper History

- About 9,000 years ago, the wild pepper plant originated near Bolivia and Peru. It was later cultivated for its fruits by the Olmecs, Toltecs, and Aztecs.
- The seeds rapidly spread throughout Central America by wind and movement of settlers.
- Columbus discovered peppers in the West Indies and mistook them for spices. He brought them to Europe where they spread throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia.
- The Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest acquired a wild chili pepper called *chiltepín* through trade with native Mexicans.
- Juan de Oñate (founder of New Mexico) and Spanish explorers are credited with bringing peppers to the U.S. in 1583.

## 3. How Do Peppers Grow?

- Peppers are warm-season crops, sensitive to freezing, and do not grow well in cold, wet soil.
- It is best to germinate seeds indoors in late winter and then transplant to the garden in late spring.
- Sweet peppers were almost always harvested when green (immature), but more recently, are harvested when red and yellow.
- Usually, redness is a sign of ripeness, not hotness.
- Sweet peppers are plump, bell shaped vegetables that usually feature either three or four lobes. There are also other varieties that have a more tapered shape and no distinguishing lobes.
- Sweet peppers usually range in size from two to five inches in diameter and two to six inches in length.

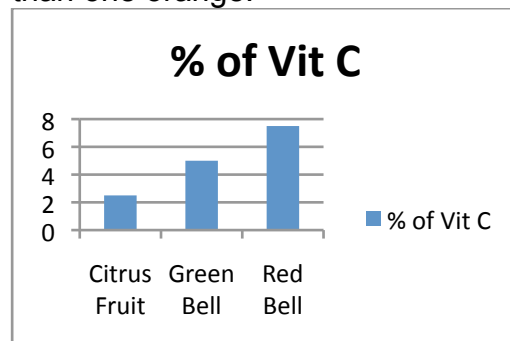
- Inside the thick flesh is an inner cavity with edible bitter seeds and a white spongy core.

## 4. What season are Peppers picked?

- In California, peppers are harvested from late April in the southern desert regions through November in the Central Valley region. In Florida peppers are harvested November through May.

## 5. Reasons to Eat Peppers

- A ½ cup of hot peppers (red and green) is an excellent source of vitamin C.
- By weight, green bell peppers have twice as much vitamin C as citrus fruit. Red bell peppers have three times as much. Hot peppers contain even more—357% more vitamin C than one orange.



- It is also a good source of vitamin A, vitamin K, and vitamin B6.
- A ½ cup of sweet green peppers is an excellent source of vitamin C.
- A ½ cup of sweet red peppers is an excellent source of vitamin A and vitamin C and a good source of vitamin B6.

## Champion sources of vitamin B6

- Avocados
- Peppers
- Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine) is one of eight B vitamins: thiamin (B1), riboflavin (B2), niacin (B3), pantothenic acid (B5), biotin (B7), folate (B9), and cobalamin (B12).

- These water-soluble vitamins are essential for growth, development, and a variety of other bodily functions.
- They play a major role in the activity of enzymes (proteins) that regulate chemical reactions in the body, such as turning food into energy.
- Vitamin B6 helps the body break down or metabolize protein, aids in the formation of red blood cells, and helps maintain normal brain function. It also plays a role in synthesizing antibodies in the immune system.
- A diet that includes whole grain products, fruits, and vegetables is sufficient to provide the body with the B vitamins it needs.

## 6. How do you pick a good Bell Pepper

- Look for firm peppers that have thick, shiny, smooth skin and green stems.
- Choose sweet peppers with a solid color—green, yellow-orange, or red.
- Choose hot (or “chili”) peppers with a solid color—red, yellow, orange, green, purple, or brown.
- Store whole peppers in a sealed plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to one week. Wrap cut peppers in plastic and store in refrigerator for up to three days.

### Tips for Preparing Bell Peppers

- Before coring and/or cutting the pepper, wash it under running water. If the pepper has been waxed, you should also scrub it well.
- Use a paring knife to cut around the stem and then gently remove it. Peppers can be cut into various shapes and sizes. To easily chop, dice or cut the peppers into strips, first cut the pepper in half lengthwise, clean out the core and seeds, and then, after placing the skin side down on the cutting

surface, cut into the desired size and shape. Peppers can also be cut horizontally into rings or left whole for stuffed peppers after carefully removing the seeds from the inner cavity.

- Nearly 2,000 varieties of peppers are cultivated worldwide. They are commonly grouped into two categories: hot (chili) and sweet peppers.
- Sweet peppers were not widely grown until after World War II. Today, there are more than 200 varieties. When left to ripen, green peppers mature into red, yellow, orange, and purple peppers with various levels of sweetness. As bell peppers mature (become red), their taste becomes sweeter and milder.

### Serving Ideas

- Slice raw sweet peppers and serve with low-fat dip for a snack.
- Top homemade pizza with sliced bell peppers—red, green, and yellow. Or, use chili peppers for a spicy kick!
- Use chopped hot peppers to make spicy salsa. (Hint: For less spice, remove seeds and inner membranes.)
- Add chopped sweet peppers to salads or stir into soups and pasta sauces.

### Facts

- Bell peppers, also known as sweet peppers, are like the Christmas ornaments of the vegetable world since they are beautifully shaped, glossy in appearance and come in a variety of vivid colors such as green, red, yellow, orange, purple, brown and black.
- Bell peppers have a delightful, slightly watery crunch. Green and purple peppers have a slightly bitter flavor, while the red, orange and

yellows are sweeter and almost fruity.

- The most popular sweet pepper in the United States is the bell pepper. .
- As bell peppers mature, their color changes from green to red and they become sweeter.
- The pepper plant is a member of the *Solanaceae* or “nightshade” family, which also includes tomatoes and potatoes.\* Peppers are botanically a fruit of *Capsicum* plants. However, in the culinary world, people recognize peppers as a vegetable.
- Pimento and paprika are both prepared from red bell peppers.