

Peppers

Farmer fact: All through elementary school my mom would pack my lunch. I was a VERY picky eater. Every day I would have a white bread, no crust, peanut butter only sandwich and a raw green pepper with a packet of salt. All the other kids could not stand the smell of the pepper when I opened the container but I didn't care, I loved my peppers! I still like to eat them like an apple. My son likes them also, and it makes me very happy to see him eating his raw pepper! If you don't like them raw...Steam them for 10 min. and stuff with your favorite blend. (Ground beef, sausage, rice, quinoa, basil, oregano, squash, tomato, cheese....endless possibilities) Sauté them in butter with some onions to liven up a cheeseburger, grilled cheese or sausage sandwich.

Peppers originated in South America as long ago as 5000 B.C. and were introduced to the rest of the world by Spanish and Portuguese explorers in the 16th and 17th centuries. Bell peppers, or capsicum annum, are in the nightshade family, which also includes potatoes, tomatoes and eggplant. Besides being eaten fresh or cooked, sweet peppers are also dried to make paprika and chili peppers are dried for cayenne. Conventionally-grown peppers have some of the highest levels of pesticides, so it's important to eat organic peppers. Hot peppers such as jalapenos contain capsaicin while sweet bell and banana peppers have a recessive gene that eliminates capsaicin. The capsaicin in spicy peppers helps with digestion and promotes fat metabolism, has anti-bacterial, anti-carcinogenic, analgesic and anti-diabetic properties and has been found to reduce triglycerides and LDL cholesterol levels in obese individuals.

Peppers are excellent sources of vitamin C (one cup has almost 200% RDA) and vitamin A, two antioxidants that work together to effectively neutralize free radicals which contribute to the causes of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis and asthma. Vitamin B6 and folic acid help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease by reducing homocysteine levels. Green peppers are also a good source of fiber, folate, and vitamins E and K as well as the minerals potassium, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, magnesium, molybdenum and manganese.

Roasted Bell Peppers

Using a gas burning stove, turn burners on high. Place peppers directly on burners. Cook until one side starts to blacken, using tongs, turn. Continue doing this until all sides are blackened. Place peppers in a tightly closed paper bag for 10 min. Remove from bag and cut peppers in half. Remove seeds and stems. Using your fingers +/- or knife work the blackened crust off. Rinse under water. Store covered in olive oil in fridge. Serve on salads or sandwiches. When all the peppers are used, use the olive oil for a yummy vinaigrette!

Roman-Style Pepper and Olive Salad

1 cup olive oil

3-4 cloves crushed garlic

Juice of 1 lemon

¼ cup chopped parsley

1 teaspoon oregano, minced

1 cup green olives

1 red or yellow onion, thinly sliced

3 red bell peppers, thinly sliced

3 green bell peppers, thinly sliced

Sauté the onion, peppers and garlic in ¼ cup of the olive oil just until soft. Make a dressing out of the remaining ingredients, add the olives, toss and chill for at least an hour before serving. This is traditionally served as part of the antipasti course. Sometimes you will see little additions such as minced anchovy fillets or cubes of cheese – feel free to experiment and create an original.

Colorful Beans with Bell Pepper

6 cups (about a pound and a half) mixed green, yellow and flat beans, trimmed and sliced into 2" diagonals

1-2 red, orange, green or yellow bell pepper, seeded and finely diced

1 cup chopped cilantro, stems OK

1-3 cloves finely minced garlic

Salt and pepper to taste

2-3 tablespoons sesame oil

1 teaspoon ground ginger

1 teaspoon toasted cumin seeds

1 teaspoon ground coriander

½ teaspoon Garam Masala, optional

½ cup chopped toasted cashews

In a large skillet or wok, heat the oil over medium-high and throw in the garlic and cumin seeds. Stir and add the other spices, then the peppers and beans. Toss and stir-fry for 7-8 minutes, cover the skillet and cook another 2-4 minutes.

Transfer to a serving platter & garnish with the chopped cashews.

Green Mint and Pepper Chutney This is another common condiment on the Indian table. It is excellent on all sorts of meat and vegetables. Keeps 1 to 2 weeks in the fridge.

3 to 5 hot peppers, like Jalapeno, Serrano or Banana Peppers, minced

5 or 6 scallions, chopped

1 green bell pepper, chopped

1 cup firmly chopped mint leaves

1 cup firmly packed cilantro

¼ cup fresh lime juice

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon sugar

½ teaspoon black pepper

In a food processor or blender, puree the peppers and scallions, then add the mint, cilantro and seasonings. Puree a bit more, then serve or store

Stuffed Peppers A staple in Jewish cuisine, this is a quick mid-week meal, especially if you cook the rice the night before.

6-8 green bell peppers, washed

1 lb. ground beef or lamb

2 cups cooked rice

1 large chopped onion

3-5 cloves minced garlic

2 eggs, beaten

2 handfuls chopped fresh herbs

Salt and black pepper to taste

For the Sauce:

1 cup tomato sauce

2 Tbls. white or cider vinegar

1 Tbls. sugar or honey

1 cup chicken or veggie stock

Cut the tops off the peppers, then core out and remove the seeds and pithy interior. Mix all the filling ingredients together and stuff the peppers. Replace the tops on the peppers and prop up or layer together in an oiled baking dish. Whisk together the sauce ingredients, pour into the pan, cover, and bake at 350* for 1 hour. Serve.