


There's a *PARTY* in My *PEPPER!*

By Jenna Cavelle

TURNING UP THE HEAT WITH MEXICO'S RACY CHILE PEPPER >>>



MANY TANTALIZING INGREDIENTS that dance in harmony will create the perfect recipe for a saucy fiesta. But only one ingredient will make your party hot, hot, hot! And that is our beloved Chile Pepper. Legend has it that the Chile Pepper took root in an area bordered by the mountains of Brazil and Bolivia in South America. Hey ladies, this one's for you... it seems the ancient wild chiles had small, round, erect, bright red fruits that made them very attractive to birds. Imagine that! Except for the "small" part of course. Okay, now brace yourself for this next tidbit of information. Birds are unable to feel the pungency associated with capsaicin, the alkaloid element that gives peppers their distinctive smolder. What a bummer, eh? However, fortunately for humans this enabled birds to chow down without getting overheated. As the birds migrated over thousands of years, the pepper seeds were spread like confetti throughout the Americas because a bird's digestive system does not harm seeds while a mammal's does. Don't you just love that something so wonderfully delicious came from something so tragically foul?

OKAY, LET'S TALK PUNGENCY. Pungency determines the amount of heat in a pepper and how long it lasts. Oh yeah, this is definitely a spot worthy of attention. The most common way of testing pungency is the Scoville Organoleptic Test. I love that word – organoleptic - it just rolls off the tongue. In this method, human subjects taste a chile sample and record the heat level. Feel the heat and share the experience...sounds like the perfect party to me! So, the samples are diluted in the laboratory until the tasters can no longer detect the heat. Oh well, look at the bright side – the human subjects last longer this way! This dilution unit is called the Scoville Heat Unit. The pungency of chile peppers is measured in multiples of 100 Scoville Heat Units, from the bell pepper at zero units to the combustible Habanero at 300,000 units. Pure Capsaicin rates over 15,000,000 units! The Red Savina Habanero has been tested at over 577,000 units! This is so much hotter than the normal Habanero that the "Guinness Book of Records" awarded it "The Hottest Chile Pepper" in the world. Now what man wouldn't bask in the glory of that title?

*Here are some traditional
salsa recipes that are
sure to bring the heat...*

Salsa Roja

- (2) large tomatoes
- (3) jalapeno peppers
- (1) small onion
- (2) garlic cloves
- 1/4-cup chopped cilantro
- 1/4-teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/4-teaspoon cumin seed
- 1/2-cup water

Begin by blistering the tomatoes and jalapeno chiles in a skillet then pan roasting with the onion and garlic. Roast until browned and soft. Next toast the oregano and cumin seeds over medium heat. Chop together the tomatoes, chiles, onion, garlic and cilantro. Add the oregano and cumin, thin with water and add salt to taste. Use immediately, or cover and refrigerate for up to 3 days. Bring to room temperature before serving. Use as salsa or as a baste for grilling seafood and meat.

Salsa Verde

- (4) cups tomatillos, husked and rinsed, cut in half
- (1) medium onion, chopped
- (4) cloves garlic
- 1/2-cup chopped cilantro leaves
- (2) small jalapeno peppers, chopped
- (1) teaspoon salt
- 1/3-cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/2-cup water

In a blender or food processor, place tomatillos, onion, garlic, cilantro, chile peppers, salt, 2 tablespoons olive oil and water. Process until slightly chunky. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, heat remaining olive oil. Add tomatillo mixture and simmer for 10 to 12 minutes, stirring frequently, until thickened. Remove from heat and pour into serving bowl. Cover and let stand 1-2 hours to blend flavors. Serve warm or cold.

Avocado Salsa

- (2) medium avocados
- (2) tablespoons lime juice
- (2) diced jalapenos
- (2) diced green onion stalks
- (1) teaspoon garlic paste
- (1) tablespoon sour cream or blue cheese salad dressing
- 1/2-teaspoon salt
- 1/4-cup cilantro

In a glass serving bowl mash together all ingredients and serve at once.

You've always known that chile peppers were yummy for your tummy but medical science convinces us that cayenne pepper has as much place in your Medicine Cabinet as on your Lazy Susan. There seems to be a consensus on the proven efficacy of capsaicin as a painkiller. Discomfort caused by arthritis, cluster headaches and post-surgical pain experienced by cancer patients may be alleviated by topical creams containing capsaicin. As if this weren't enough proof that chiles are amazing, they have nutritional benefits as a potent source of essential vitamins and nutrients. The antioxidant vitamins A, C, and E are present in high concentrations in various chile types. Chiles are richer in vitamin C than the usual sources such as citrus fruits. A green chile (medium-sized bell pepper) pod has about six times as much vitamin C as an orange. In fact, vitamin C contained in paprika was the source of a discovery that led to a Nobel Prize. While working at Szeged University in 1931, scientist Albert Szent-Gyorgyi isolated pure vitamin C ascorbic acid from paprika. As a result, in 1937 he got a call from the Nobel committee.

Additionally, chiles are an important source of the provitamins alpha-, beta- and gamma-carotene and cryptoxanthin, which are transformed in the human digestive tract into vitamin A. The daily vitamin A requirement is met by one-half tablespoon of red chile powder. In addition, chiles provide high amounts of vitamins P (bioflavonoids), B1 (thiamine), B2 (riboflavin), and B3 (niacin). Hot, healthy

and full of flavor – the chile pepper just may be the perfect companion!

The chile peppers' final thrust and my personal favorite, comes from its celebrated aphrodisiac properties. Hot and spicy foods have long been thought to be sexual stimulants. The physiological responses from consuming capsaicin-rich foods include increased heart rate and metabolism and sweating. Considering that these results are similar to the physical reactions experienced during sex, this hypothesis may have some merit.

Yes, the chile pepper had a crappy trip to the Americas and is all fired up! So chop, chop! Sharpen those knives, shine those cutting boards and let's get this party started right! But before you get too jazzed up keep these important details in mind when preparing your next fiesta. The heat in chiles is concentrated in the interior veins or ribs near the heart, not in the seeds themselves. The seeds taste muy caliente because they're in close contact with the veins. Yeah, baby! As a general rule, the bigger the chile, the milder it is. Hmmmm...smaller chiles are hotter because proportionally they contain more seeds and veins than larger chiles.

OKAY, I'M *NOT* GOING TO TOUCH THAT! But, in the off chance that you need to work out some of the unwanted fire of a pepper just remove 'his' oops, I mean 'its' seeds and veins. Then cut up the chiles and soak them in salt water or boil them in vinegar for at least an hour. Ouch! Is Lorena Bobbit in the house? The power of suggestion can be as strong as the power of peppers, so don't be afraid to heat up your party and fire up your sex life by including a few extra jalapeños in your next recipe!