



HERB OF THE YEAR – THE CHILE PEPPER

The Chile Pepper, a member of the Solanaceae family, has been used for thousands of years as a culinary and health-promoting herb or spice. It is widely used in Mexican, Asian, and Cajun cuisines. Don't be deceived by the chile's mild aroma, because it's active component, capsaicin, gives it a hot and fiery taste!



Safety First

It is important to **always wear gloves** when working with chile peppers, because their spicy oils can hurt your skin. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling them and avoid contact with the eyes. **Do not grind chiles in a closed room** - Be sure that there is plenty of ventilation.

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Culinary Preparation Methods – How to Roast, Freeze, and Dry Chile Peppers

I. How to Roast and Freeze Green Chiles

- a. **Ingredients** – Green chiles
- b. **Equipment and Materials**

Towel for drying	Tongs	Knife (optional)
Oven broiler	Paper bag, food-safe plastic bag, or heat-safe covered bowl	Spoon (optional)
Baking sheet(s)	Freezer bag(s) or shallow, freezer-safe container(s)	Gloves to protect your hands (optional)
Aluminum foil	Cutting board (optional)	

c. **Instructions**

1. Select chiles – Choose fresh chiles that are heavy, smooth, and crisp.
2. Preheat the broiler: Position a rack 4 to 6 inches below the heating element of your broiler and preheat to high or 400°- 450°F.
3. Wash and dry the chiles, place on a baking sheet, and put them into the oven.
4. Roast the chiles on one side, then on the other: broil for about 3-5 minutes each side. Avoid completely blackening the chiles; you're looking for them to be about 60% to 70% charred.
5. Let the peppers cool for 5 minutes, then steam to loosen the peel. Place them into a heavy plastic bag, seal it, cover with a towel, and then let sit for 15 minutes or longer. Peel, seed, and chop them.
6. When chiles are completely cooled, place in a container and freeze for up to one year.



- d. **Recipe Notes - Alternative Roasting Methods:** outdoor grill, electric or gas burner, cast iron skillet, or open flame

II. How to Dry Chiles

- a. **Air Dry:** Dry the chiles by stringing them and hanging them in a dry place.
b. **Dehydrator:** Dry the chiles in a food dehydrator.
c. **Smoking:** Put the chiles in your smoker and use oak wood to smoke them.

III. Making Dried Chiles into Powder or Flakes

Note: The peppers must be totally dry!

Dispose of stems and save the seeds for next year. Break the chiles into small pieces and grind in a coffee grinder using the “fine” setting. Store in an air-tight jar.

Health Uses – Capsicum’s Health Benefits

Many cultures have used the chile pepper to improve or enhance health. Western Herbalism often uses *Capsicum frutescens*, or Cayenne, as a tonic herb/spice to tone and support the cardiovascular, circulatory, and digestive systems in the body. It is one of the premier “movers and shakers”, in that it stimulates circulation and movement of fluids throughout the body. Some of its health benefits include:

- Stimulates blood flow and strengthens the heart, blood vessels, and nerves
- Helps with chilblains, warming hands and feet
- Reduces inflammation, congestion and swelling in body, and breaks up mucus in the respiratory system (e.g. sinuses)
- Can be used at the onset of a heart attack to stimulate circulation and may reduce the effects of the attack
- Can be used topically to bring blood to an area, increasing circulation and decreasing inflammation and pain. Helps remove waste products and increases the flow of nutrients to the tissues
- Reduces the pain of shingles
- Stimulates sluggish digestion and relieves flatulence (gas) and colic
- Reduces arthritic or rheumatic pain and inflammation, especially in the lower half of the body (knees, hips, low back)
- Boosts the body’s metabolic rate (can be upwards of 25%)

There are various preparations used to reap Capsicum’s/Cayenne’s health benefits. It can be:

- added fresh, dried, or powdered to culinary dishes and recipes – it’s available at just about every grocery store
- made into and taken as an alcohol extract (tincture)
- ingested in capsule form
- incorporated into a healing cream, oil, or salve for topical use

Presented by the Northern California Unit of the Herb Society of America

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