

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

FAX: 932-5261

March 11, 2010

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

## **HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776

### **Speaking of Peppers -The Eyes Don't Know It All**

When it comes to the glorious variety of peppers, you can't tell by looking.

Maybe in our parents' years only the green peppers were mild or sweet and only the red ones were hot, but not so now. You can not tell the sweetness or heat of peppers by their color. You can't tell by their shape either. Some long thin peppers are mild, some are hot. Even if you can identify a Jalapeño, there's no way to tell by looking if the other long, thin, short, round, fat or flat peppers are hot or mild.

Most peppers start out green. They're young and not fully ripe at that stage. But they are definitely flavorful and can certainly be eaten when they're green. As they age and ripen most varieties will turn red. Some have been developed that turn orange, yellow, purple or almost black instead of red. But a sweet, mild pepper will still be mild whether it's green, red, yellow or purple.

In terms of nutrition, those red, yellow or orange peppers actually beat out the green ones. Peppers in general have more vitamin C per ounce than most other fruits or vegetables, including oranges and other citrus fruits. The riper, more brightly colored peppers have more vitamin C than green ones do. So don't think you're only getting fiber and flavor when you add peppers to the salad or the soup.

As for shape, it like the color has nothing to do with heat. The long, slender banana-type peppers are usually fairly mild, but some of the hot peppers are long and slender too. The hottest peppers, Scotch bonnet and Habaneros, are usually small and

**Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.** The Institute of Food And Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Employment Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with regard to race, creed, color, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M., University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.

round, but tiny Thai peppers are slender and very hot.

One other characteristic that makes a difference in how they can be used is how thick the skin is. Some peppers have a fairly thick, fleshy skin. These are great for stuffing, since there's plenty of flesh to hold the stuffing and still keep its shape. Thick skinned peppers are best if you want to char them to remove the waxy skin, to broil or roast, or for sticking on a shish-kabob skewer. But these peppers are harder to dry, since it takes longer for them to dry out. Thin skinned peppers have plenty of flavor and are great for slicing or dicing, for salads or cooking. You can guess how thick or thin the flesh is by how heavy the pepper feels. Peppers that are light for their size are likely to be thin-skinned.

Peppers naturally have a rather waxy skin which some people don't care for. Luckily it's easy to remove the waxy part, and no, you don't have to try to peel it off with a knife. Use the thickest –fleshed peppers, the ones that feel the heaviest, for peeling. You can either do it in the broiler or over a burner, though a gas burner works much better than an electric burner. Lay the washed peppers on the broiler pan and cook just until the skin starts to blister. Turn them over at least once to blister the other sides. Or use tongs to hold them a gas flame, or charcoal if you're grilling. When they have at least one blister on most sides, slip them quickly into a paper bag or a zipper-seal plastic bag, seal it shut and let them sit for 10-15 minutes. Then hold them over a dish to catch the juices and use the tip of a sharp knife to slit the skin and peel it off. Slice the peppers into halves or quarters, remove the seeds and stem, and you're ready to use them. If you skin hot peppers be sure to wear gloves to protect hands, and eyes!

You might find once you've charred and skinned them a few times that you prefer them this way. They will be softer, but the charring definitely adds a sweeter, almost smoky flavor to them. Some Mexican dried peppers are smoked, to add the extra flavor.

Here's a basic pepper sauce that can be served over omelets, baked on top of fish or chicken, or served beside sausages in a bun. Make a batch and try it several ways.

#### Pretty Pepper Topper

½ pound green or yellow sweet bell peppers	3 Tbsp olive oil
2 cups thinly sliced onions	2 tsp minced garlic
4 cups peeled, seeded, thinly sliced tomatoes	½ tsp basil
½ tsp dried oregano	salt, pepper to taste

Wash peppers and slice thinly. You should have about 2 cups. Sauté peppers and onions in oil over low heat 6-8 minutes, until soft. Add garlic, stir for half a minute. Add tomato strips and seasonings. Cover, cook 5 minutes until juicy. Remove cover and continue cooking gently until almost dry. Add to fish or chicken before baking, or wrap inside omelets. Serves 4.