

Did You Know?



Cayenne, *Capsicum annuum* Cayenne Group

- The botanical name *Capsicum annuum* includes many different kinds of pepper such as bell peppers, jalapenos, pimentos, serrano and poblano peppers, among many others. These peppers are in the nightshade family, (Solanaceae), which also includes eggplant, potatoes, and tomatoes.
- The cayenne pepper has long seed pods that turn red at maturity. The plant grows three to five feet on average and has cream-colored flowers.
- Grow in full sun in rich, well-drained soil. The abundance of bright red pods makes this pepper an attractive plant to grow in the garden as well as in containers.
- Harvest the pods when the skin looks waxy, firm and is a vibrant red.
- The pods can be used fresh, dried and crushed, or ground into a powder. They are used in the commercial production of hot sauces and are included in many seasoning blends and rubs.
- Capsaicin is responsible for the “heat” and the carotenoids capsanthin and capsorubin primarily give cayenne its red pigment.
- On the Scoville Heat Unit scale (SHU), cayenne measures 30,000 to 50,000 SHU. (bell pepper registers 0, jalapeno is 3,500 to 5,000 SHU, and habanero is 100,000 to 350,000 SHU).
- Ethnobotanists speculate that cayenne peppers were eaten and used for medicinal purpose in early Mexican and Central American civilizations, eight thousand years ago.
- Medicinal uses continue today, including topical treatment for arthritis, muscle pain and sprains. It has also been used as an antifungal, anti-irritant, and antibacterial and has been included in remedies to treat stomach upset, ulcers, colds, sore throats, coughs, gastrointestinal complaints among others.
- Pepper spray is made from a derivative of cayenne pepper.

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