

# Pepper Cultural Highlights: North America



## Fun Facts

- Each year, Mexico produces nearly 500,000 tons of fresh pepper pods and 30,000 tons of dry pepper pods.
- Mole Poblano is a special sauce combining chiles and chocolate that is used only for special occasions such as Christmas. For the Aztecs, this sauce was reserved only for royalty, nobility, religious officials and military. There is even a legend that Aztec warriors would drink 50 jugs of mole poblano a day to soothe their nerves during battle!
- Enslaved people who lived on Thomas Jefferson's various plantations grew peppers in the gardens for their own cuisine and for the household. Jefferson's physician even used to prescribe the family a red pepper gargle to relieve sore throats.
- Chili peppers are very important in southwestern United States cuisines. In New Mexico, it is estimated that the average family eats hundreds of pounds of chilies each year!
- In 1796, Amelia Simmon's published the first truly American cookbook, and included several recipes that called for equal parts cayenne and salt.
- The University of Georgia developed pepper spray in the 1960s using chilies. It was originally made for postal workers to ward off dogs on their routes.
- Following the Civil War, Southern cuisine became very bland because of the destruction of farmland and the end to legal enslavement of African Americans. As a result, Edmund McIlhenny of Louisiana created Tabasco sauce using different types of chilies and vinegar to add more flavor.



## Pepper Spotlight:

New Mexico Green Chili  
or Hatch Chili



New Mexican chilis are some of the most sought out peppers in the world. They are so important to their culture and economy that there are laws prohibiting the sale chilis described as "New Mexican" unless they are grown in the state.

# Pepper Cultural Highlights: Europe, South America, Asia



## Europe

- Although hot peppers made their way through the world via Spain and Portugal, they are not prominent in the food traditions of these countries because the explorers took so many seeds on their conquests around the world, that they barely left any at home!
- Peppers are not very prominent in European cuisine, however, pepper experiments in Europe during the 1800s have shaped the different varieties that exist today. During that period, Hungarians began to breed chili peppers with to develop a 'milder' chili. Through these efforts, they eventually created a pepper that was consistently mild, and even sweet --- bell peppers! The Hungarians went even further with their pepper quest and ground bell pepper to make a new spice – Paprika!

### Pepper Spotlight:

**Piment Doux Long des Landes (Basque Fryer)**  
Found mostly in southwestern France and the Basque regions. This pepper is known to evoke an apple and guava flavor. It is known for having a slim shape with lots of twists!



**Recipe:**  
[Hungarian Chicken Paprikash](#)

## South America

- Although chili peppers are thought to have originated in South America, they are only used sporadically in the different cuisines throughout the continent.
- In Peru, there is a chili known as rocoto that are dangerously hot. Rocoto are so pungent that there is an expression just for them – *llevanta muertos* – meaning 'hot enough to raise the dead.'

### Pepper Spotlight:

Rocoto



This pepper is very popular in the Andes mountains. Unlike other pepper plants, rocoto have black seeds, purple flowers and thick leaves.



**Recipe:**  
[Chimichurri](#)

## Asia

- In places such as Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan, peppers are even hotter because of the high altitude. The Bhutanese love hot peppers so much that they specifically praise their children as their spice tolerance becomes better.
- Hot peppers are also found in traditional Chinese medicine as a heating and pungent agent (beneficial for removing moisture from the lungs or diaphragm).
- In East Asia, the presentation and overall heat of a meal are very important. Originating in the Thai seaside town of Sriracha, Kashmiri chilis make a popular sauce that is used to accompany fish in this region. It became so popular that it is bottled and sold around the world.

### Pepper Spotlight:

Bhut Jolokia

**Bhut Jolokia:** This was once one of the hottest peppers in the world. Hailing from a hilly area in northern India, this pepper is named after the King Cobra because of its fierce bite. The Hornbill Festival in Kohima India is specifically for pepper dare-devils to come out and eat some of the hottest peppers out there. In 2013, one woman ate 51 Bhut Jolokia in only 2 minutes!



**Recipe:**  
[Chicken Curry](#)



# Pepper Cultural Highlights: Africa and the Middle East



## Africa

- Chili peppers came to the African continent in the 15th century via Portuguese colonists, and very quickly became a staple in African food traditions. While they originated in the Americas, hot peppers thrive in various African countries, and have been growing wild for centuries.
- Chili peppers are so influential in many African cuisines that there have even been songs written about them! The classic Cameroonian hit song, “Pepe’s Soup” by Manu Dibango, is a tribute to the importance of hot peppers in this West African chili chowder.



### Pepper Spotlight: Piri Piri

This little pepper might be tiny, but it sure is mighty! Piri Piri is an extremely hot pepper (175,000 heat units on the Scoville scale) that contains an acidic taste with a hint of sweetness.



### Recipe: Jollof Rice

## Middle East

- The Turks are responsible for taking peppers throughout the world, but especially in the Middle East. After discovering hot peppers for the first time while fighting the Portuguese in India, the Turks quickly began selling peppers all over their empire.
- In the Middle East and North Africa, chilies are ground and concentrated into pastes and condiments in order to add more intense flavor to certain dishes.
- In Yemen, there is a chili sauce named zhoug that is more than just a condiment – this sauce is believed to ward off disease, to warm people up in the winter, and to burn off calories.

### Pepper Spotlight: Aleppo Pepper

These peppers originated in Aleppo, Syria, which is located along the Silk Road where Europe, North Africa and Asia meet. As a result, this city has been famous for centuries for its variety of spices, and especially the chili flakes that are ground from dried Aleppo peppers.



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Cultural Highlights

#pepperpalooza



### Recipe: Muhammara

