

CAPSICUMS



INTRODUCTION

Capsicums, or sweet peppers, are equally known in New Zealand as Peppers. Native to tropical America, they took several centuries to spread to Europe. It was not until the second half of this century that capsicums become widely popular in Britain and United States, interest in New Zealand followed.

TYPES

Capsicums are seed pods and can be red, green, yellow, orange, white or purple. Green and red capsicums grow on the same plant, it's just that a red pepper is a ripe green one. Yellow, orange, white and purple are different varieties. Red and green capsicums are by far the most commonly found, although yellow capsicums are also becoming widely available. White, orange and purple capsicums have a more limited supply. Capsicums are sweet and juicy with a mild spicy flavour. Being riper, red capsicums are sweeter than green capsicums.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Capsicums should be well shaped and have skins which are firm and shiny. Avoid those with soft spots or a shrivelled appearance.

HOW TO KEEP

Store at 7–10°C with a 90–98% relative humidity. Lower temperatures will cause chilling injury. Consumer storage: Refrigerate in plastic bags.

NUTRITIONAL VALUE

Capsicums are high in vitamin C and supply vitamin A, potassium and some B group vitamins.

HOW TO PREPARE

You need to remove the seeds and inner membranes. If you want to stuff the capsicum, cut the stem off and remove the seeds from the top, otherwise it's easier to cut the capsicum in half first. If you wish to remove the skins from the capsicum, roast, grill or barbecue until the skin blisters and is blackened. Place in plastic bag or tightly covered dish for a few minutes until cool enough to handle. The skins will then easily peel off.

WAYS TO EAT THIS VEGETABLE

Capsicums are delicious raw or cooked. You can use them raw in a salad, cut them into strips and eat them with dips, or use them as an edible garnish. Capsicums taste great in casseroles, on kebabs, as a side dish, on pizzas, with meat, beans and vegetables and in pasta sauces. Try them stuffed with rice or a bread crumb mixture and baked. Roasted peppers are increasingly popular either hot or cold.

WHEN YOU CAN GET IT

You can buy peppers all year round but their main season is from January until April.

TIPS FOR RETAILING

Always handle with care, damaged capsicums decay rapidly. Refrigerate while on display. Temperature control is very important with peppers, below 7°C chilling injury or pitting will result. Temperatures above 10°C will encourage ripening or development of red colouring in green peppers and speed up decay. Display different coloured peppers together to make an attractive display.