

BETTER KNOW YOUR VEGETABLES

This Week ... Bell Peppers

High in vitamins C and A, crunchy bell peppers contain powerful antioxidants and lycopene which help keep cholesterol, cancer, and arthritis at bay. Native to Central and South America, Spanish and Portuguese explorers carried seeds first to Europe and later to Africa, the Middle East, and China. Grown today throughout the world, sweet (not hot) peppers are especially popular in Central Europe and the Mediterranean. Sweet peppers carry a recessive gene that inhibits the development of capsaicin, the spicy compound found in chile peppers. Green peppers are simply unripe specimens that, when left to mature, can bloom into red, orange, yellow, and purple varieties.

Store peppers in the crisper drawer of your refrigerator or freeze them whole. Roast, stew, or sauté peppers, eat them raw, or pickle them in relish.



HOW TO ROAST A PEPPER

The end goal is a pepper with evenly black and blistered skin. Purists favor the stovetop method, which brings the pepper into closest contact with heat, charring the skin without overcooking the pepper. This method requires close supervision, so if you're strapped for time, opt for broiling. If you're broiler is broken or non-existent, then the oven will have to suffice.

Gas Stovetop - With flame on high heat, place pepper directly on top of the burner. Char peppers on all sides, rotating with tongs, for several minutes.

Broiler - Preheat the broiler and place peppers in a roasting pan. Set under broiler, about 4 inches from the heat source. Allow peppers to char (but not blacken too severely), turning occasionally until peppers collapse, 10 to 20 minutes total.

Oven - Place whole peppers in a roasting pan and place in a 500 degree oven with the rack set near the top. Roast, shaking the pan frequently until peppers shrivel and collapse, 30 to 40 minutes.

Regardless of method used, immediately transfer roasted peppers to a bowl and cover tightly with plastic wrap. Once cool enough to handle, peel, discarding skin, stems, and seeds.

FANCY BELL PEPPERS

From The Silver Spoon

3 tablespoons olive oil, plus extra for brushing
4 yellow bell peppers
6 salted anchovies, heads removed, cleaned and filleted, soaked in cold water for 10 minutes and drained
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 fresh flat-leaf parsley sprig, finely chopped

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Brush an ovenproof dish with oil. Halve the peppers, including the stems and remove the seeds and membranes. Place cut side up in the prepared dish and bake for 15-20 minutes. Meanwhile, chop the anchovy fillets. Place them in a bowl, add half the olive oil and mash until smooth. Add the garlic, parsley, olives, and basil. Place the tomatoes in another bowl, stir in the remaining olive oil and season with salt and pepper to taste. Remove the bell peppers from the oven but do not switch it off. Fill each bell pepper half with the tomatoes, lay a slice of mozzarella on top and add a tablespoon of the anchovy sauce. Return to the oven and bake for 10 minutes.

Preheat the broiler. Place the bell peppers on a lightly greased baking sheet, skin side up, and broil, about 8 inches from the heating element until the skin is charred, about 5 minutes. Let cool, then peel off any black skin you wish to, leaving most of the lightly charred skin on the peppers. Transfer to a bowl and mix in the salt.

Heat the oil in a small saucepan over medium-high heat and cook the garlic, green chile peppers, and ajwain seeds about 1 minute, then add the basil and mint and cook another minute. Transfer to the grilled peppers and mix well. Serve immediately or refrigerate up to 10 days.

OVEN-ROASTED BELL PEPPERS

From 1,000 Indian Recipes by Nellam Batra

8 small to medium bell peppers of mixed colors, quartered lengthwise, seeded and stemmed
1/4 teaspoon salt, or to taste
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 large clove fresh garlic, minced
1 to 3 fresh green chile peppers, such as Serrano, minced with seeds
1/2 teaspoon coarsely ground ajwain seeds
2 tablespoons minced fresh basil leaves
1 tablespoon minced fresh mint leaves

Preheat the broiler. Place the bell peppers on a lightly greased baking sheet, skin side up, and broil, about 8 inches from the heating element until the skin is charred, about 5 minutes. Let cool, then peel off any black skin you wish to, leaving most of the lightly charred skin on the peppers. Transfer to a bowl and mix in the salt.

Heat the oil in a small saucepan over medium-high heat and cook the garlic, green chile peppers, and ajwain seeds about 1 minute, then add the basil and mint and cook another minute. Transfer to the grilled peppers and mix well. Serve immediately or refrigerate up to 10 days.

Scant 1 cup green olives, pitted and finely chopped
6 fresh basil leaves, finely chopped
9 ounces tomatoes, peeled and diced
9 ounces mozzarella cheese, sliced
Salt and pepper