

Preserving Peppers

Peggy Van Laanen*

Spicy peppers are a popular complement to meals. There are many varieties, ranging in pungency from the sweet bell pepper to the fiery Serrano. The general rule is, the smaller the pepper pod, the hotter. That's because the capsaicin (the compound in chile peppers that gives them their heat) is in ribs of the pepper, and smaller chilies have a higher rib-to-meat ratio.

Peppers can be canned, pickled, frozen or dried. When canning and pickling peppers, follow the directions exactly. Peppers preserved improperly can cause botulism, a dangerous food poisoning that can be fatal.

The oils in some pepper varieties can cause chemical burns, so handle them carefully. It's a good idea to wear rubber gloves and be careful not to touch your eyes or face with unwashed hands.

Selection

Select firm peppers with smooth skin and no disease, soft spots or insect damage. For canning, an average of 9 pounds of peppers is needed per canner load of 9 pints.

Preparing Peppers for Canning or Pickling

Chile peppers and other tough-skinned peppers. These peppers are best when peeled before they are preserved. To do this, first slit the skin lengthwise in several places. Then roast the peppers in a hot oven (400 degrees F) for 6 to 8 minutes until the skin blisters. Or, cover a burner with a layer of heavy wire mesh and place the chiles on the hot burner for several minutes. Turn peppers frequently so they blister evenly and do not scorch.. After blistering peppers, place them in a pan and cover them with a damp cloth, or dip them into ice water to cool. This makes them easier to peel.

Pimiento peppers. Blanch peppers by scalding them in boiling water for about 10 to 20 minutes, or roast as described above to loosen skins. Remove skins, stems, blossom ends and seeds. Flatten pimientos.



Bell peppers. Remove stems and seeds; blanch 3 minutes.

Canning Peppers

Peppers are low in acid and must be processed in a pressure canner. Wash peppers and peel tough-skinned varieties. Then prepare as follows.

Hot pack. Small peppers can be left whole; large peppers should be quartered. Pack peeled peppers in hot pint or half-pint jars, leaving 1 inch of space at the top. Add 1/2 teaspoon salt per pint, if desired. Fill jar with boiling water, leaving 1/2 inch of space at the top. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Put on lids and process in a dial-gauge or weighted-gauge pressure canner using proper procedure. (See L-2217, "Home Canning Vegetables," available from the Texas Agricultural Extension Service.)

Follow the recommended processing times in the chart below.

Recommended processing time for peppers in a dial-gauge pressure canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Processing time	Canner pressure (PSI) at altitudes of:			
			0 to 2000 ft.	2001 to 4000 ft.	4001 to 6000 ft.	6001 to 8000 ft.
Hot	Half-pints or pints	35 min.	11 lbs.	12 lbs.	13 lbs.	14 lbs.

Recommended processing time for peppers in a weighted-gauge pressure canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Processing time	Canner pressure (PSI) at altitudes of:	
			0 to 1000 ft.	Above 1000 ft.
Hot	Half-pints or pints	35 min.	10 lbs.	15 lbs.

Pickling Peppers

Peppers must be properly acidified for pickling. The pickling recipes that follow include vinegar as a source of acid. Use only tested, approved pickling recipes and do not alter the proportion of ingredients or the amount of vinegar.

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Cut large peppers into pieces. Small peppers may be left whole, but must be prepared in one of the following ways so the vinegar solution will penetrate them:

Blanch whole peppers in water or steam for 3 to 5 minutes.

Prick individual peppers with a fork or slash with a knife.

Blister and peel peppers using one of the methods described above.

Process pickled products in a boiling water canner to ensure that they will not spoil. Follow proper procedure for processing (See L-2216, "Home Canning Fruits and Tomatoes," available from the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, for instructions on using a boiling water canner.) Individual recipes may have specific instructions for preparing peppers. Follow instructions in the recipes.

Pepper Sauce

(Jalapeno, Hungarian or Banana)

Wash and drain small hot peppers. Cut off stems to within $\frac{1}{8}$ inch of the pepper. Make two or three slits in each. Pack tightly into hot jars, leaving $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of space at the top. Fill jars to within $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of the top with boiling hot cider vinegar. Wipe jar rims. Put on lids. Process half-pints in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes at sea level. Process 15 minutes at altitudes of 1000 to 6000 feet. At altitudes higher than 6000 feet process 20 minutes.

Marinated Peppers

(Bell, Hungarian, Banana, Jalapeno)

(makes about nine half-pint jars)

*4 pounds firm peppers
1 cup bottled lemon juice
2 cups white vinegar
1 tablespoon oregano leaves
1 cup olive or salad oil
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped onions
2 tablespoons prepared horseradish (optional)
2 to 3 cloves garlic, quartered (optional)

Wash peppers. Peel tough-skinned varieties such as chiles. Blanch other peppers for 3 minutes in boiling water. Small peppers may be left whole; large ones should be quartered. Flatten whole peppers.

Mix lemon juice, vinegar, oregano, oil, onions and horseradish in a saucepan and heat to boiling. Place $\frac{1}{4}$ clove garlic in each jar. If desired, add $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt to each half-pint jar, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon to each pint. Fill jars with peppers to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from the top. Pour hot, well mixed oil/pickling solution over peppers, leaving $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of space at the top. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Put on lids. Process half-pints or pints in a boiling water canner for 15 minutes at sea level. At

altitudes of 1000 to 6000 feet process for 20 minutes. At altitudes above 6000 feet process 25 minutes.

*For **hot** style, use 4 pounds of jalapeno peppers.

For **medium** style, use 2 pounds jalapeno peppers and 2 pounds sweet and mild peppers.

For **mild** style, use 1 pound jalapeno peppers and 3 pounds sweet and mild peppers.

Pickled Jalapeno Peppers

(one pint jar)

Jalapeno peppers (about 1 pound)

1 cup vinegar

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup water

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon mixed pickling spices

Wash peppers and pack tightly into a hot jar, leaving $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of space at the top. Combine vinegar, water, salt and pickling spice; heat to boiling. Pour boiling liquid over peppers to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from top of jar. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Put on lids. Process in boiling water canner 10 minutes. At altitudes of 1001 to 6000 feet process for 15 minutes. At altitudes above 6000 feet process for 20 minutes.

Freezing Peppers

Peppers become soft when frozen and thawed, and are best used in cooked dishes where texture is not important.

Peppers do not have to be blanched before freezing, but blanching sweet or bell peppers makes packing easier and they take up less storage space. Blanch for 3 minutes and cool before packaging. After blanching, cut out stems and remove seeds. Freeze them whole, halved or diced.

Pepper pieces can be individually frozen on a tray in the freezer and then packaged. Use moisture- and vapor-proof packaging such as freezer jars, freezer-grade plastic cartons, or freezer-grade self-seal plastic bags.

To freeze hot peppers, wash them and remove stems. Then package and freeze. Pimiento peppers can be peeled first. Leave $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of space at the top of the container when packaging.

Peppers for chile rellenos should be peeled, stems and seeds removed, and the peppers flattened to remove air. Packaging with a sheet of waxed paper between chiles makes them easier to handle as they thaw.

Drying Peppers

Peppers are easy to dry. No pretreatment is necessary.

Hot peppers. To dry whole peppers, wipe them clean with a damp cloth and arrange them in a thin layer on trays or string them together with needle

and cord. Dry until pods are shriveled, dark, red, and crisp. Large peppers dry better if cut in half and the seeds and stems removed. Small peppers can be dried whole, but should be slit to speed drying. Grind dried peppers and use them as seasoning.

Sweet and pimiento peppers. Wash and remove core, seeds and partitions. Cut into disks about $\frac{3}{8}$ by $\frac{3}{8}$ inch. Dry in a dehydrator for 8 to 10 hours.

Store dried peppers in moisture- and vapor-proof package in a cool, dry, dark place. Use them within a year.

More Pepper Pointers

When your mouth is on fire from eating peppery foods, soothe the burn with milk or other dairy products. The burning is caused by the capsaicin in peppers. Milk washes away the capsaicin.

Keep fresh chili peppers refrigerated in a paper bag. If purchased in good condition, they should keep at least a week.

Pepper Jelly with Liquid Pectin

(makes five half-pint jars)

4 or 5 hot peppers, cored and cut in pieces
4 sweet green peppers, cored and cut in pieces
1 cup white vinegar
5 cups sugar
1 pouch liquid pectin
Green food coloring

Sterilize canning jars by boiling for 10 minutes at altitudes of less than 1,000 feet. At higher altitudes, boil 1 additional minute for each additional 1,000 feet elevation. Put half the peppers and half the vinegar into a blender container; cover and process at liquefy until peppers are liquefied. Repeat with remaining peppers and vinegar. Combine liquefied peppers/vinegar and sugar in a large saucepan and boil slowly for 10 minutes. Remove from heat. Add liquid pectin and boil hard 1 minute. Skim. Add a few drops of green food coloring. Pour jelly immediately into hot canning jars, leaving $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of space at the top. Wipe jar rims. Put on lids. Process 5 minutes in a boiling water canner at altitudes up to 1000 feet. Add 1 minute of processing time for every 1000 feet of additional altitude.

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