

Capsicum annuum var. *longum*

[Synonyms : *Capsicum longum*]

CHILI is a shrub. Native to tropical America (traditionally from Cayenne in French Guiana) and to southern India, it has white to yellow flowers of which some are violet-centred with yellow stamens.

It is also known as Africa pepper, American pepper, Banana pepper, Capsicum, *Cayennapfeffer* (German), *Cayenne* (English, French), Cayenne pepper, *Chang tian jiao* (Chinese), Chile pepper, Chili pepper, Chilli, Cockspur pepper, Common red chili pepper, *Gewürzpaprika* (German), Goat's pepper, Hot pepper, Hungarian wax pepper, *Jhine khursaanii* (Nepalese), *Lal-mirchi* (Hindi), Long pepper, *Milakai* (Tamil), *Nagami tougarashi* (Japanese), *Ngau kok tsui* (Chinese), *Niu jiao jiao* (Chinese), Paprika (English, Finnish, Swedish), *Pepe di Cayenna* (Italian), *Peperoncino* (Italian), Pepper, *Piment* (French), Pod pepper, Red pepper, Tabasco pepper, Spanish pepper, and Zanzibar pepper.

The gathered fruit are dried and ground. (Most of the high Vitamin C content is lost in drying.) Chili (or chilli) peppers are smaller and vary in pungency from mild to extremely hot (removal of the seeds when the fruit are being used fresh, can sometimes reduce the pungency). The dried fruit of the variety known as Cayenne are a mid-orange (paler than Chili and darker than Paprika) and have a hot, burning taste and a spicy smell (which can irritate the nose). The dried and ground paprika is a brilliant red powder when fresh (usually stale if it is brown).

Warning – the gastro-intestinal system and the kidneys can be severely aggravated by large doses. Prolonged use on the skin can cause dermatitis and blisters.

Annuum means 'annual'. *Longum* is Latin (long) meaning 'long or tall'.

When Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) the Genoese explorer, was given hot spicy food by the Arawaki of the West Indies his firm belief that he was in India made him assume incorrectly that the pungency emanated from pepper (*Piper nigrum*) instead of the chilis which were known to the Arawaki as *aji*. Both the Aztecs and the Inkas cooked with chilis extensively – as do the Mexicans today.

Hungarian chefs are particularly associated through much of the world today for their traditional savoury dishes spiced with paprika. For these Hungary is convinced she cultivates the best plant specimens for preparing the popular seasoning.

Today the seeds are used as a base for commercial sauces and blended powders, and both are used as a flavouring by the food industry. The blends were first created in the 19th Century in the North American south-west. Commercially retailed 'chili powder' is unlikely to be chili alone and is likely to be only mildly pungent. It can contain allspice (*Pimenta dioica*), cloves (*Syzygium aromaticum*), cumin (*Cuminum cyminum*), garlic (*Allium sativum*) and oregano (*Origanum vulgare*).

The peppers contain beta-carotene and it is understood that the American Cancer Society believes that a diet consisting of a high content of these plants can help to reduce the risk of contracting some forms of cancer.