

# HOT BUSH PEPPER

Tobasco Pepper, Bird Pepper

*Capsicum frutescens*

Solanaceae

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## ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

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### Description

Peppers are recorded as cultivated in Bolivia and Meso-America ca. 16th century. This many-branched, shrubby perennial herb produces more fruit and requires less water and fertilizer than the sweet varieties. *C. frutescens* bears fruit that point upward and include varieties such as the Tabasco pepper, the Thai Bird Pepper “Prik Khi-nu” and the Barbados “Wirri-wirri” peppers. *Capsicum frutescens* L. which is much more pungent than *Capsicum annuum* L. is used in tabasco, tabasco sauce, and other red chili pepper. Sweet bell peppers, paprika, jalapenos, pimento, and other red pepper products come from *Capsicum annuum*.

### Uses

There are many varieties of chili peppers, characterized by the amount of capsaicin they contain in their tissues. When a pepper is eaten, the capsaicin found in the placenta irritates tissues in the digestive tract inducing sweating, salivation, flow of gastric juices, runny nose and teary eyes. Capsaicin is used in ointments for sore muscles, shingles and psoriasis. Hot pepper sprays and smokes are used as defense agents and even as agents of torture.

### Cultivation

Peppers require a long hot season for growth. Day temperatures should be 23°-32° C (75°-90° F). Peppers do not tolerate compacted or poorly-drained soil or weed competition. They respond well to mulches of leaves, compost or plastic and regular irrigation. Peppers should be rotated seasonally and should not follow another solanaceous crop (i.e. tomatoes, potatoes, or eggplant). They grow well in raised beds and in containers. If seeds don't germinate well, soak them overnight.

### Harvesting and Seed Production

The fruit may be eaten at any stage of development, fresh or dry. For seed, cut mature fruits from the plant when firm and glossy and of good color. At this stage, peppers contain the highest vitamin A and C content, and have higher vitamin C than equivalent amounts of citrus. Mature colors vary from yellow to red to brown to purple. *C. frutescens* is red when mature. Remove seeds to be saved from fresh or dried fruit, then rinse in mild vinegar or bleach solutions to discourage seed-borne pests and diseases. Dry seeds in moving air then store below 40° F (4.4° C), at the lowest possible humidity. In closed containers, seeds can remain viable for 5 years.

### Pests and Diseases

Peppers are generally not prone to pests or disease, but if aphids are a problem, check the undersides of the leaves and growing branch tips. When a large aphid population is present, sticky “honeydew” appears on the lower leaves and fruit. If this situation occurs, wash with soapy water or apply a suggested insecticide. People who use tobacco should wash their hands with soap and water before handling pepper plants to prevent spread of tobacco mosaic disease. Grow resistant varieties if possible.

### Cooking and Nutrition

Chilies dry well, but are spicier than when eaten fresh. They are used dry, fresh, eaten whole or minced into a variety of dishes. Pepper “heat” is rated by the capsaicin content using “Scoville Units” to compare them. Habanero rates 100-400,000, Thai Bird Pepper 70-80,000, Tabasco 30-50,000, and Jalapeño 5-15,000. Consumption of chilies is being studied as a risk factor in kidney and gastric cancer, but some cultures eat chilies to alleviate stomach problems!