

HABANERO PEPPER

Bonnet Pepper, Datil Pepper, Squash Pepper

Capsicum chinense

Solanaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Description

Capsicum chinense or bonnet peppers are typically very hot including the hottest peppers in the world according to the Scoville scale. These include the habanero, ghost peppers, and bonnet peppers. ECHO also has a unique "Sweet" Habanero that produces peppers that are not hot, although occasionally some fruits will revert to the typical hot pepper.

Origin

This pepper variety was first cultivated in the West Amazon basin and now is grown all over the tropics

Uses

Capsaicin, the chemical compound in the Habanero Pepper that gives it the "hot" characteristic is odorless, colorless and tasteless but is a mighty irritant. The pepper is not usually eaten as a vegetable but rather used as an additive or flavoring in dishes. It is also used in liniments for sore muscles, in "anti-mugger" sprays and as an insect and deer repellent.

Common Names

Cultivation

This variety of pepper has some distinct preferences according to soil, temperature and day length. The soil where the Habanero Pepper is planted must be sandy and loamy, as its roots require extra oxygen. Raised beds could be successful with this crop. It favors hot weather, above 20° C, (50° F), a long growing season, some form of mulch, black plastic or row covers to warm the soil and suppress weeds. The plants are self-fertile, grow 2-4 ft high and produce peppers that are 1-2 in long. It is best to grow transplants that are 8-10 weeks old.

Harvesting and Seed Production

When fruits are mature, they should be firm and glossy looking. Hand cutting not pulling of peppers from the stalks will maintain the brittle plants in order for all peppers to ripen on the plant. Select the choicest peppers to save for seed. Let these ripen until the flesh begins to shrivel or if frost threatens, cut the peppers, dry them in indirect sun in a well-ventilated area until ready to harvest the seeds. The extremely irritating chemical is found in the placenta that supports the seeds, near the stem end so avoid contact with the skin. Wash the seeds, let dry in indirect sun. Store in closed containers.

Pests and Diseases

There are few insects that attack the fruit of the Habanero Pepper as the chemical acts as an irritant to the pests as well as to humans. Some diseases are carried by the seeds therefore infected plants should be destroyed before fruit ripens. Rotation of crops and use of companion crops that will attract beneficial insects should be practiced. Plant roots that are weakened by deep cultivation, compacted soil, waterlogged soil and soil low in calcium will produce a poor crop.

Cooking and Nutrition

It is estimated that the irritating chemical found in the Habanero Pepper is 1000 times hotter than that in the jalapeño pepper and therefore its use is restricted to flavoring dishes. Handlers should wear gloves and keep from touching other areas of the body, especially the eyes. The peppers are rich in vitamins A and C both of which increase in amount as the fruit ripens.