

For the Love of Chilli



For over 9 thousand years' human beings have been enjoying the benefits of the chilli plant. Being officially domesticated in Mexico over 6 thousand years ago it has long been enjoyed as both a flavour enhancer in cooking as well as medicine for many ailments.

The medicinal component of chilli is Capsaicin. This compound is well known for its anti-nociception abilities which is the ability to reduce pain sensations in the body. It is the release of endorphins that create this effect and also the pleasurable and sometimes euphoric sensations that can be felt with the ingestion of chilli. Capsaicin is used in ointments, patches and creams and applied topically to temporarily relieve pain experienced with arthritis, strains, sprains and neuropathies.

Chilli also contains large amounts of vitamin C, potassium, B6, magnesium and iron. It is the vitamin C content that greatly increases the absorption of iron from plants. Chilli is a good source of other anti-oxidants, specifically vitamin A, E, lutein and zeaxanthin. These last two nutrients are carotenoids, which are responsible for the varied and bright yellow to red colours of the fruit. They play a role in preventing sun damage to the eye; reducing the risk of age-related macular degeneration and some studies indicate they may also improve bone health in older women.

In the kitchen, there are many varieties of chilli to be enjoyed. One of these is the common spice paprika which comes from a variety of mix air-dried chilli's of the annum species. Sweet paprika is mild as it contains mainly the fleshy middle and outer part of the chilli, whereas hot paprika is made from the pith and placenta in the very middle, where the chilli holds most of its heat. A third member of the paprika family is the very popular 'Smoked' Paprika, which is obtained by traditionally smoking the dried chilli fruit over oakwood resulting in a more mild yet rich depth of flavour.

Paprika is a common spice used in many recipes from your traditional Hungarian Goulash, Persian Eggs, or a spicy Spanish Paella. It is also very handy for making curries, casseroles or marinades & rubs for your favourite meats.

Cayenne pepper is another spice of the chilli family well known for its fiery flavour. Being one of the hottest varieties of chilli available, it gets its name from the city of Cayenne in French Guiana, South America. Cayenne pepper is used in many South American recipes including Chilli Con Carne, which has become a household favourite around the globe.

Whether you are using the various forms of paprika, cayenne pepper or your standard chilli flakes and powder, rest assured not only are you bringing delicious spice to your recipes, but your body is also reaping the many medicinal benefits this unique fruit offers.

Enjoy your chilli, and your week in the kitchen

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