

Chile Primer

Fear not, the chile is not as dangerous to handle or cook with as many may think. If you are not used to the “heat” generated by spicy chiles, start with less of the spice or use more mild versions of the chile (see descriptions below). Over time you will learn to distinguish between the different types of chiles, the amounts to use for each based on your taste and your taste for “spicy” will improve as well.

Remember, if your dish is too “hot” add a touch of maple syrup or honey or a chunk of sweet fruit like papaya, mango or banana to soften or balance the dish. It’s just like adding salt to a dish. The spiciness of the chile can be increased or decreased once in the dish by other sweet flavours.

The “heat” from the pepper comes from the chemical *capsaicin* which is where the name capsicum (the family name for peppers grown on a bush) comes from. *Capsaicin* develops in the veins of the pepper as it grows and provides the hottest part of the chile when fresh. Over time and especially after drying, *capsaicin* drips down the veins into the seeds where it is stored. This is why the seeds of dried peppers are the hottest part of the chile and can be easily removed if you want to cool down the spice.

Here’s a short list of heat and character chart of some of the more commonly used chiles found in North America:

Pepper Name	Scoville Heat Units	Flavour Profile
Habañero	150,000-325,000	Plum tomato, apple
de Arbol	15,000 – 30,000	Woody
Serrano	10,000 – 23,000	Fruity, citrus
Chipotle	7,000 – 15,000	Smoky, nutty, tannic
Jalapeño	2,000 – 7,000	Vegetable
Poblano	1,000 – 2,000	Green, vegetable
Ancho	1,000 – 2,000	Fruity, brown, caramelized
Mulato	1,000 – 2,000	Smoky, licorice
Pasilla	1,000 – 2,000	Fruity, grape-like

And in descending order of fire, here are some additional descriptions of chiles used most often in Southwest cuisine:

Serrano

Narrow, about two inches long, it turns from green to red as it matures. It is very, very spicy, but it also has real pepper flavor, not just heat.



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Jalapeño

Resembles a Serrano but is larger and more tapered. It is about three inches long and half as wide, broader at the stem than at the base. It too ripens from green to red. The jalapeño is almost pure heat, but you can get more flavour by roasting it. It is most often used raw and very finely diced in salsas in Southwestern cuisine. It is available canned, but fresh is highly recommended.

Chipotle

[chih-POHT-lay]

A dried and smoky jalapeño, brownish in colour, with a wrinkled skin and a fiery, smoky flavour. Chipotles are very versatile, and are used to add an underlying note of smoky flavour to many dishes.

Poblano

Resembles a green bell pepper but is pointy and very dark. It has a thick flesh and a fresh pepper flavour. This is one of the more popular chiles because it has such an incredible pepper flavour. It is roasted, skinned, seeded and stuffed for chile rellenos and roasted and added to sauces and salsas. Poblanos usually are not too hot, although they can vary. Get to know your source and experiment!

Pasilla

[pah-SEE-yah]

In its fresh form this chile is called a *chilaca*. It's generally 6 to 8 inches long and 1 to 1 1/2 inches in diameter. The rich-flavored, medium-hot pasilla is a blackish-brown color, which is why it's also called *chile negro*. This chile is sold whole, and powdered. It's particularly good for use in sauces.

Ancho

A dried Poblano, the Ancho is red with a flavour almost like that of a slightly hot raisin. Anchos are often dried then re-hydrated for pureeing into sauces. Anchos lend a sweet note, but they can be bitter so sometimes they have to be balanced with honey or maple syrup.

Anaheim

A long and thin, bright green, mild chile, the Anaheim has very little heat. Roasted and sliced, it gives flavour to sautéed or roasted potatoes, roasted and diced into sauces and salsas.

Sweet Peppers (Bell Peppers)

Part of the same *capsicum* family, bell peppers comes in red, yellow, orange and green. They can be roasted and skinned, grilled or pureed for sauces and vinaigrettes.



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Long Listing of Chile Heat

Chile Pepper	Heat Range
Sweet Bell	0
Pimento	0
Cherry	00 ~ 500
Pepperoncini	100 ~ 500
El-Paso	500 ~ 700
Santa Fe Grande	500 ~ 750
Coronado	700 ~ 1,000
Espanola	1,000 ~ 2,000
Poblano	1,000 ~ 2,000
Ancho	1,000 ~ 2,000
Mulato	1,000 ~ 2,000
Pasilla	1,000 ~ 2,000
Anaheim	500 ~ 2,500
Sandia	500 ~ 2,500
NuMex Big Jim	500 ~ 2,500
Rocotillo	1,500 ~ 2,500
Pulla	700 ~ 3,000
Mirasol	2,500 ~ 5,000
Guajillo	2,500 ~ 5,000
Jalapeno	2,500 ~ 8,000
Chipolte	5,000 ~ 8,000
Hot Wax	5,000 ~ 10,000
Puya	5,000 ~ 10,000
Hidalgo	6,000 ~ 17,000
Serrano	8,000 ~ 22,000
Manzano	12,000 ~ 30,000



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Chile Pepper	Heat Range
De Arbol	15,000 ~ 30,000
Jaloro	30,000 ~ 50,000
Aji	30,000 ~ 50,000
Tabasco	30,000 ~ 50,000
Cayenne	30,000 ~ 50,000
Santaka	40,000 ~ 50,000
Super Chile	40,000 ~ 50,000
Piquin	40,000 ~ 58,000
Yatsafusa	50,000 ~ 75,000
Haimen	70,000 ~ 80,000
Chiltecpin	60,000 ~ 85,000
Thai	50,000 ~ 100,000
Tabiche	85,000 ~ 115,000
Bahamian	95,000 ~ 110,000
Carolina Cayenne	100,000 ~ 125,000
Kumataka	125,000 ~ 150,000
Jamaican Hot	100,000 ~ 200,000
Birds Eye	100,000 ~ 225,000
Habanero	100,000 ~ 325,000
Scotch Bonnet	150,000 ~ 325,000
Red Savina Habanero	350,000 ~ 577,000
Pure Capsaicin	15-16,000,000