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# Bell Peppers!

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**Bell peppers come in different colors such as green, yellow, orange, red and even purple. Most bell peppers start out green, then mature and ripen the longer they stay on the vine. As bell peppers change in color, they also increase in sweetness and nutritional value.**

## Growing

Bell peppers tend to grow best in warmer temperatures. The ideal temperature range for best growth is between 62 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

Bell peppers grow best when started from seeds indoors in late winter, followed by planting outside in late spring. Sow seeds indoors eight to 10 weeks before the date of your last spring frost.

Set plants 18 to 24 inches apart in a row, or 14 to 18 inches apart in all directions. Set plants no deeper in the soil than they were previously in the pots to avoid rotting.

Bell peppers thrive in fertile and moist soil, so keep the soil moist while the plants are in bloom and producing peppers. About 1 to 1½ inches of water per week is sufficient.

## Harvesting

Harvest promptly when fruits reach the desired size and color. You should cut the pepper off the vine with scissors or a knife as opposed to ripping it off. This prevents any further damage to the plant or other peppers that are growing.

## Nutrition

One medium-sized bell pepper has about 25 calories, 0 g fat, 6 g carbohydrate, 1 g protein, 2 g fiber, 12 mg calcium, 207 mg potassium, 4 mg sodium and 120 mg vitamin C. It also contains vitamins K, E, A and B6 and folate.

## Storing

Keep bell peppers in the refrigerator, and for optimal freshness, use within a week. If bell peppers have been cut, keep them refrigerated and store in an airtight container or plastic wrap.

## Preparing

After harvesting bell peppers, rinse them with water. Cut around the core and discard that section. Bell peppers can be eaten fresh, steamed, grilled, roasted or stuffed.

**Freezing:** Bell peppers are easy to freeze. Begin by rinsing and drying peppers thoroughly to help prevent freezer burn. Cut peppers as desired, removing all seeds. Spread the pepper slices on a baking sheet in a single layer and freeze them. This will prevent the peppers from freezing together in clumps. Transfer the frozen peppers to freezer bags. Use heavy-duty freezer bags and eliminate as much air as possible from the bags to help prevent any freezer burn.




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# Recipes

**Key to abbreviations**

c. = cup
tsp. = teaspoon
Tbsp. = tablespoon
oz. = ounce
lb. = pound(s)
g = gram
mg = milligram

## Roasted Bell Pepper Hummus

2 whole red bell peppers
¼ c. tahini*
¼ c. lemon juice
2 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
1 garlic clove, minced
½ tsp. cumin
Pinch of cayenne
Salt to taste
1 (15-oz.) can chickpeas

Roast the peppers. Wash and cut peppers into quarters, scrape out the insides. Move oven rack directly under broiler. Set peppers skin side up on a baking sheet; place in oven on top rack. Set oven to broil and broil peppers for 5 to 10 minutes, until skin is charred. Let peppers cool. Can remove charred skin and chop or leave skin on and chop.

Blend tahini and lemon juice for one minute, scrape sides and blend for additional 30 seconds. Add olive oil, garlic, cumin and salt; blend for 30 seconds, scrape sides and blend for another 30 seconds. Drain and rinse can of chickpeas. Add half to blender and blend for 1 minute. Scrape sides and add other half of chickpeas. Blend for 1 to 2 minutes. Scrape sides. Add peppers and blend until smooth. If hummus is too thick, add water until it's thin enough. If hummus is too thin, blend in additional chickpeas.

Serve with carrot sticks, celery sticks, pepper sticks, crackers, pita chips, etc.

Makes eight servings. Each serving has 130 calories, 8 g fat, 4 g protein, 11 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber and 85 mg sodium (without added salt).

*Tahini may be found in the specialty foods section of many grocery stores.

Recipe courtesy of the Family Wellness Center, Fargo.

## Red Pepper Bruschetta

1 bulb garlic (8 to 10 cloves)
1 tsp. olive oil (for garlic roasting)
2 medium sweet red peppers, halved and seeded
3 Tbsp. fresh parsley, minced
2 Tbsp. fresh basil, minced
1 Tbsp. lemon juice
¼ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. pepper
2 Tbsp. olive oil (for spread)
12 oz. French bread

Heat oven to 425 F. Remove outer skin of garlic bulb (don't separate cloves). Brush with 1 tsp oil. Wrap in foil. Place garlic and peppers (cut in half, skin facing up) on baking sheet and place in oven. Broil peppers until skins blister, about 10 minutes. Immediately place peppers in a paper bag and let sit 15 to 20 minutes. Peel and discard charred skin. Coarsely chop peppers. Leave garlic in oven until soft, about 30 minutes. Cut top from garlic bulb, squeeze garlic out and chop finely.

In a bowl, combine parsley, basil, lemon juice, salt, pepper and 2 Tbsp. oil. Add peppers and garlic; mix well. Cut bread in 16 slices about ½ inch thick; broil until toasted slightly. Top toast with pepper mixture and serve immediately.

Makes eight servings. Each serving has 170 calories, 5 g fat, 4 g protein, 27 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber and 320 mg sodium.

## Breakfast Bell Peppers

4 large bell peppers, whatever color you like
1 Tbsp. olive oil (or your favorite oil)
1 c. diced white onion
1 lb. turkey sausage
3 Roma tomatoes, diced
2 c. fresh spinach, rinsed
1 c. canned black beans, drained and rinsed
6 large eggs
½ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. pepper
½ c. part-skim mozzarella cheese, shredded
¼ c. chopped chives

Preheat oven to 350 F. Lightly grease a 9- by 13-inch baking dish. Arrange the bell peppers side by side in the greased baking dish, cut side up. Set aside. Warm the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onions and cook about 5 minutes to soften. Add the sausage and cook until no longer pink. Add diced tomatoes; cook for 1 to 2 minutes. Stir in the spinach and cook an additional 1 to 2 minutes until wilted. Remove from the heat. Rinse and drain beans, then add beans to the mixture.

Spoon the sausage mixture evenly into your prepared peppers. In a medium-sized mixing bowl, whisk together the eggs, salt and pepper. Pour the egg mixture over top of the sausage mixture. Top with the mozzarella cheese. Return to the oven and bake an additional 35 to 40 minutes until eggs are fully set and cheese is golden brown. Garnish with chopped chives if desired.

Makes eight pepper halves. Each filled pepper half has 140 calories, 7 g fat, 9 g protein, 11 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber and 290 mg sodium.

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