

Bell Peppers



Bell peppers are a crunchy, tangy vegetable choice. They come in a variety of colors: green, yellow, orange, or red. Some are even purple. Bell peppers are green if harvested early; if left to ripen on the plant, they turn yellow, then orange, and then red. Part of the nightshade family (like potatoes, tomatoes and eggplant), these sweet-flavored peppers are plump and bell-shaped with three to four lobes and a glossy exterior.

Bell peppers are available throughout the year, but are most abundant and delicious during the **summer and early fall** months. Peppers add color, flavor, and texture to salads, pizza, and pastas.

Selection: To find the best pepper, look for signs of appropriate freshness, e.g., **deep color, glossy skin and firmness**. Avoid peppers with water spots, cuts, thin or torn walls, flimsy sides, or wilting.

Storage: Store unwashed peppers in a **plastic bag in the refrigerator**. Peppers should stay fresh for at least a week. Green bell peppers will stay fresh a bit longer than red, orange and yellow ones. Because bell peppers need to stay hydrated, **include a damp cloth** or paper towel in the vegetable compartment to help them retain moisture. Do not cut out the bell pepper stem prior to storage in the refrigerator. Bell peppers are especially sensitive to water loss when stem is removed.

Sweet peppers can be **frozen** without first being blanched. It is better to freeze them whole, since there will be less exposure to air which can degrade both their nutrient content and flavor.

Nutrients/nutrition: Peppers are low calorie, low fat, and low sodium and provide a body ~220% of the daily value of **vitamin C**, 20% of the daily value of **beta carotene**, and 5% of the daily value of **potassium** (208 milligrams), as well as 3 grams of **fiber**. Additionally, evidence shows us that bell peppers provide a broad range of **antioxidants** and phytonutrients like flavonoids, carotenoids, and hydroxycinnamic acids.

Preparation: Chop, dice, or slice the peppers for easy meal accompaniments. Always remember to **wash them gently in cold water** (hot or warm water can damage them). To take advantage of the summer abundance, peppers can be frozen. When freezing, core the peppers first, then cut, spread them in a single layer on a cookie sheet. Place the tray in the freezer for at least one hour. Once frozen, measure desired amount, and place in freezer bags.

If you prefer to enjoy the bounty now, then try **roasting** or **grilling**. Cut a slit near the stem of each pepper and apply heat. If grilling, use a long-handled fork to hold the pepper. Turn the pepper over a flame until the skin is blackened. If using an oven, then **broil** the peppers ~4 inches away from the heating source. After the skin is blackened, then place the hot peppers in a zip lock bag for 15 minutes to allow them to steam. The steam helps remove the skin.

Eat well to be well!