

# Red Hot Chilli Peppers



Chillis vary enormously in size, shape, colour and intensity. They can be tiny and very hot, or large, fleshy and sweet. They form the *Capiscum* family, which comes from the Greek word 'kapto' which means 'bite'. This is a plant that bites back!

## History

It is believed that chilli peppers were enjoyed in the Americas around 7500 B.C., and maybe even earlier. Their popularity spread around the world and now they are widely cultivated in Mexico, China, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia and India. Even in the U.K. many gardeners grow them in greenhouses, alongside their tomatoes.

## Measuring Their Heat



Wilbur Scoville

It is capsaicin, a fiery chemical, which gives the pepper its spicy heat. In 1912 an American chemist, Wilbur Scoville, invented a method of measuring the amount of capsaicin in a particular pepper. The Scoville scale ranges from sweet peppers, which have no capsaicin at all, to pure capsaicin which is rated at sixteen million S.H.U. (Scoville Heat Units).

## Pain or Pleasure?

People's tolerance to the pain or pleasure of chilli varies hugely. While most are reduced to tears at about 300,000 S.H.U., many enjoy a hotter experience. The pleasure of chilli-eating is a result of our bodies producing endorphins in response to the burning sensation. It is these endorphins which give us a sense of happiness. The very hottest chilli pepper, according to the Guinness Book of Records, is the bhut jolokia which rates a staggering one million S.H.U.

Some like it hot! How peppers line up.

PEPPER	SCOVILLE HEAT UNITS
Sweet pepper	0
Pimento	100 - 500
Jalapeno	2,500 – 8,000
Thai	50,000 – 100,000
Bird's Eye	100,000 – 225,000
Scotch Bonnet	150,000 – 325,000
Red Savina Habanero	350,000 – 580,000
Bhut Jolokia	1,000,000 +
US Police Grade pepper spray	5,000,000

Wilbur Scoville image courtesy of Google images

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## QUESTIONS

- ① The S.H.U. scale was named after which American chemist?
- ② For around how many years have people been enjoying chilli peppers?
- ③ What other words could replace the following? Hint: use a thesaurus.  
intensity  
cultivated
- ④ From the article, which peppers could be expected to at least reduce someone to tears.
- ⑤ Unscramble the following words.  
chimcael    pppeer
- ⑥ What is the substance which gives the chilli pepper its heat?
- ⑦ Write some adjectives to describe chillis. Suggestion: you could use the senses of sight, smell, touch and taste.
- ⑧ Write about a food which uses chillis. This could be a description, using your adjectives in point ⑦, or write out a favourite recipe which uses chillis, including the ingredients and method. Use an image to ADD to your text (not just a pretty picture!). Remember to credit your sources.

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## ANSWERS

The S.H.U. scale was named after which American chemist?

**Wilbur Scoville**

For around how many years have people been enjoying chilli peppers?

**7500 plus 2008 = 9508 years maybe more**

What other words could replace the following in the text?

Intensity **strength, concentration, power**

Cultivated **grown, planted**

From the article, which peppers could be expected to at least reduce someone to tears.

**Any over 300,000 SHU – Scotch Bonnet possibly, Red Savina Habanero, Bhut Jolokia**

Unscramble the following words.

**chemical pepper**

What is the substance which gives the chilli pepper its heat?

**Capsaicin**

## TEACHING NOTES

Although this was written for Catering students, extending the activity to police defence tactics could also interest Public Services and Citizenship learners. Other learners have enjoyed this assignment as hot foods seem to be very popular. I brought in a few fresh chillis which caused a lot of laughing as they tried them. REMIND THEM TO WASH THEIR HANDS AFTERWARDS AND NOT TO TOUCH FACES, EYES ETC.

EXTENSION: the use of pepper spray by police in America. What measures do our police use? CS gas (known as tear gas), batons, water cannons ...

Link on CS gas <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A655517>