Heat up summer with peppers

Summer is here and so are hot temperatures. With summer vegetables ripening on the vine, one vegetable, the hot pepper, is ready to heat up summer recipes.

For safety’s sake. Capsaicin is the chemical substance that makes some peppers hot. Each variety of pepper has its own distinctive flavor and level of hotness. When working with hot peppers, use proper precautions. Oil from hot peppers, known as capsicum oil, is an irritant to skin and eyes. Wear rubber gloves when handling hot peppers and wash hands thoroughly before touching the face or eyes. To remove oil that has come in contact with skin, cover affected skin with olive or vegetable oil and wipe clean with a paper towel. Wash skin with soap and water to a full lather and follow with a complete rinse. Dry with a clean paper towel.

All pepper varieties should be pressure canned, except for pickled peppers. Contrary to folklore, hotter peppers do not have more acidity. The hotness depends on the amount of capsaicin it contains. All peppers are considered low-acid foods (pH between 4.8-6.0) and should be pressure canned unless properly acidified, such as pickling.

Take proper precautions, preserve safely, and enjoy hot peppers all year round.

Preserving peppers. Common hot pepper varieties include Hungarian, Banana, Chile and Jalapeno. Excess peppers can easily be preserved using the following options:

Freezing. The simplest method of preserving peppers is freezing. Simply wash peppers and remove stems. Package in rigid container or a flexible freezer bag or wrapping designed for use in the freezer, leaving no headspace. For more information on appropriate containers for freezing, see Stamp Out Freezer Burn with Proper Packaging (http://extension.missouri.edu/franklin/documents/QFK/14AprilQFK.pdf) or http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze/containers/html. Seal container and freeze.

Drying. Peppers can be sun-dried (although difficult to do in Missouri), air-dried or dehydrated using an oven or dehydrator. Dried peppers can be stored in moisture- and vapor-proof packaging in a cool, dry, dark location for several months. Soak dried peppers in water to rehydrate.

Sun drying—sun drying requires high temperatures (above 85) and low humidity. This can be difficult to achieve during Missouri summers. High humidity can cause peppers to spoil before they dry. If proper conditions are met, remove seeds, stems and membranes and slice or cut into cubes. Small peppers can be left whole but should be slit with a knife to speed drying.

(Cont’d on page 2)
Seek a safe salsa recipe

Salsas are a mix of acid and low-acid ingredients. If not adequately acidified to a pH at or below 4.6, a boiling water canner will not provide sufficient heat to prevent botulism. Without detailed knowledge of ingredients, proportions and procedure used, there is no way to tell if the product is safe.

Fortunately, USDA and Cooperative Extension have a variety of tested recipes for canning salsa at home. Ten different salsa recipes can be found in the University of Georgia publication Sensational Salsas http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/uga/sensational_salsa.pdf.

Additionally, there is a Choice Salsa recipe available through the National Center for Home Food Preservation, located at http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_salsa/choice_salsa.html. This salsa allows you to choose the proportion and variety of onions and peppers used in the recipe.

If you find that these recipes still don’t meet your needs, try freezing your favorite salsa.

Source: Your Favorite Salsa Recipe...Is it Safe to Can? Preserving Food at Home blog, brought to you by the National Center for Home Food Preservation, hosted by the University of Georgia.
Keeping food safe during power outages

Strong storms, flooding or heatwaves often cause power outages during summer months.

Freezer. If the power might be off for an extended period of time, set the freezer to between –10 and –20 degrees. The colder the freezer, the longer foods will stay frozen.

If the power does fail, do not open freezer. With a closed door, food will usually stay frozen in a fully loaded freezer for about 2 days. Cover freezer with blankets to help hold in cold, but be sure to pin the blanket away from the air vent openings to prevent overheating of the motor once the electricity comes back on.

If the power will not be back on for several days, dry ice can be used to keep temperature below freezing and prevent food spoilage. Fifty pounds of dry ice should keep the temperature of a full 20-cubic-foot freezer below freezing for 3-4 days and in a half-full freezer for 2-3 days.

Foods can be safely re-frozen only if they still contain ice crystals or if they have been at refrigerator temperature (40 degrees) for no longer than 2 days.

- Discard foods if they have warmed above room temperature and have completely thawed.
- Refreeze vegetables only if they contain plenty of ice crystals.
- Although not dangerous, fruit will ferment when they spoil, causing off taste and smell. Refreeze only if taste and smell are acceptable.
- Refreeze meat only if it contains ice crystals. Flavor and texture may be affected.

Refrigerator. Food stored under refrigeration is only safe to eat as long as the power has been restored within 4 hours. Keep door closed as much as possible and discard any perishable food that has reached over 40 degrees for over 2 hours.

And always remember, “When in doubt, throw it out!”

Source: GH1506, Quality for Keeps: Freezer Problem Solver, University of Missouri Extension.

Why packages say “Do not refreeze”

Frozen food packers want their products to have a good image with shoppers. Because quality can deteriorate if interior product temperatures range up to 40 degrees, many manufacturers do not recommend refreezing such thawed food because they cannot guarantee quality under such conditions.

Freezer management

A freezer (a chest or upright unit that maintains a temperature of 0 degrees or below) offers convenience and flexibility, but it can rarely be justified only on the merits of saving money. To get the greatest use out of your freezer, keep it fully stocked. A rapid rate of turnover—once every six months—is recommended to greatly reduce the operating cost per pound of food.

Freezing home-prepared foods

- All flavoring should be added when a dish is prepared for heating before serving because:
  - Black pepper, cloves, onion and garlic (in casseroles, for example) become stronger during freezer storage
  - Other seasonings tend to weaken in freezing
  - Stews keep better than fried or broiled meats.
  - Some foods do not freeze well, or have a very limited storage life, such as:
    - Mayonnaise, which does not keep as well as salad dressing
    - White of hard cooked eggs, which get tough and rubbery
  - Food to be frozen should not be cooked to a well-done stage.
  - Cream–style sweet corn retains its flavor better than whole kernel corn and far better than corn on the cob.
**Marinated Peppers**

- 4 lbs firm peppers*
- 1 cup bottled lemon juice
- 2 cups white vinegar (5 percent)
- 1 tbsp oregano leaves

* Bell, Hungarian, Banana or Jalapeno peppers are best suited for marinating.

For hot style - Use 4 lbs jalapeno peppers.
For medium style - Use 2 lbs jalapeno peppers and 2 lbs sweet and mild peppers.
For mild style - Use 1 lb jalapeno peppers and 3 lbs sweet and mild peppers.

**Yield:** About 9 half-pints

**Procedure:** Select peppers and wash. Peppers may be left whole or quartered. Make two to four slits in each pepper and either blanch in boiling water or blister in order to remove the peel of tough-skinned peppers. To blister, place peppers in a hot oven (400 degrees) or broiler for 6-8 minutes or until skins blister. Allow peppers to cool, place in a pan, and cover with a damp cloth. After several minutes of cooling, peel each pepper and flatten. Mix all remaining ingredients in a saucepan and heat to boiling. Place 1/4 garlic clove (optional) and 1/4 teaspoon of salt in each half pint jar or 1/2 teaspoon per pint jar. Fill jars with peppers, add hot, well-mixed oil-pickling solution over the peppers, leaving 1/2 inch headspace. Wipe the rims of jars with a clean, damp cloth, adjust lids and process.

Process half-pint jars in boiling-water canner for 15 minutes at 0-1,000 feet altitude, for 20 minutes at 1,001-6,000 feet altitude, or 25 minutes if above 6,000 feet.

**Source:** National Center for Home Food Preservation, [http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_06/marinated_peppers.html](http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_06/marinated_peppers.html), Adapted from the “Complete Guide to Home Canning,” Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539, USDA, revised 2009.

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