



GROWING & USING **CAPSICUMS & CHILLIES**

WRITTEN BY JOHN MASON AND STAFF OF ACS DISTANCE EDUCATION

CONTENTS

Credits	5
CHAPTER 1 HISTORY AND SCIENCE	6
History of the capsicum	8
Taxonomy of the capsicum	10
CHAPTER 2 GROWING CAPSICUMS	11
Growing requirements for capsicums	12
Temperature requirements	12
Light requirements	12
Plant spacing requirements	14
Nutritional requirements	14
Cation exchange capacity and nutrients	15
Ph requirements	16
Soil organic matter	18
Fertiliser requirements	19
Nitrogen	20
Phosphorus	20
Potassium	20
How much to apply	20
Nutritional requirements of capsicums	20
Plant tissue analysis for nutrients	22
Plant analysis guide for sampling time, plant part and nutrient levels of capsicums	23
Soil water	26
Watering capsicums	26
Cultural techniques	28
Cover crops	28
Crop rotation	28
Companion plants	28

Propagation.....	29
Pest and disease problems.....	29
Pests	30
Diseases	31
Other problems.....	31
General guidelines to control pest and disease problems.....	32
Harvesting.....	33
CHAPTER 3 SPECIES AND CULTIVARS	34
Bell peppers.....	35
Long sweet yellow peppers.....	36
Hot red capsicums.....	36
Heritage or heirloom varieties versus hybrids.....	36
Some capsicum cultivars.....	38
Suggested varieties to grow.....	46
Sweet or bell peppers.....	46
Chilli peppers.....	48
Other chilli pepper cultivars.....	50
Hungarian varieties.....	50
CHAPTER 4 USING CAPSICUMS	51
Nutritional value.....	52
Growing capsicums as commercial crops.....	52
Growing capsicums for ornamental purposes.....	52
Capsicums as preserves	53
Freezing capsicums.....	53
Drying capsicums.....	53
Cooking.....	54
Handling peppers.....	55
Medicines.....	56
Pesticides.....	56
Other.....	56

Recipes.....	57
Traditional Italian classics.....	57
Thai style.....	59
Spanish style.....	59
Mexican style	62
Indian style.....	65
Modern style.....	67
Drinks.....	67
APPENDIX	68
Distance Learning and Online Courses.....	68
E-books by John Mason and ACS Staff.....	69
Printed books by John Mason	70
Useful Contacts.....	71
ACS Global Partners.....	71
Social Media.....	71

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CHAPTER 1 HISTORY AND SCIENCE

We all know capsicums as the vegetable that can be eaten fresh or cooked, or used to add flavour to a huge range of dishes from Asian stir fries to Mediterranean dishes and Mexican chilli beans. Capsicums have a huge range of other uses as well including condiments such as sweet chilli sauce and ornamental uses like bedding plants grown for colourful foliage or fruits. Whilst this book is primarily written as a resource for commercial growers, it is also intended to be of value to home gardeners and enthusiasts who will benefit from its wealth of information.

Capsicums are also known by the common names of 'pepper' or 'chilli'. The capsicum species that we grow most widely around the world is *Capsicum annuum*. Capsicums belong to the Solanaceae family of plants, as do tomato, eggplant and potato. A very wide variety of weeds and ornamental plants also belong to this family; some are also edible, but many are toxic, if not deadly.

Most capsicum cultivars grow to between 40 and 90 cm tall, though occasionally they can be outside this range. They

are actually perennials, and may survive two or more years in mild climates or greenhouses; however, they are more commonly treated as annuals, being grown over the warmer months of the year in temperate and subtropical climates.

Plants grow fast if conditions are good i.e. moist, well-drained, fertile soils, and warm (but not hot) temperatures. Healthy and strongly growing plants can produce ongoing flushes of flowers, followed by rapid development of fruits, for as long as conditions remain good.



Capsicum annuum - Bell Pepper fruits are wide, with a bell-like shape, and have a fat, sweet, and 'not so hot' flesh.



Chilli Peppers are generally longer and narrower than the sweet or bell peppers; and are hotter tasting.