FOOD $ENSE

UtahStateUniversity COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Sweet Peppers

Food $ense Guide to Eating Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

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Utah Local Fresh Season: Mid August to Mid October

Availability: Sweet peppers are available year round, but taste the best and are less expensive during the summer.

Eating: Sweet peppers can be eaten raw or cooked. Raw peppers can be added to green, pasta, or potato salads, coleslaw, stir-fry, omelets, fajitas, soups, hot or cold sandwiches, cut into rings and used as a garnish, sprinkled on top of a pizza, or in salsa. They can be sliced into casseroles, chopped and mixed with rice, added to meat dishes like spaghetti, fried as a side vegetable, or cut into chunks for kebabs.

Cooked peppers can be added to other foods like cooked pasta with seasoned tomatoes, parmesan cheese and diced chicken, fajitas, breakfast burritos, sautéed vegetables, and as a topping for steak, hamburgers, hot dogs or bratwurst. They are particularly good stuffed with a mixture of cooked rice, tomatoes and onions as a main course.

Selecting: When selecting peppers, look for firm skin, without any wrinkles, and stems that are fresh and green. The peppers should feel heavy for their size. Avoid peppers with sunken areas, slashes or black spots.

Cleaning and Preparing: Wash fresh peppers gently in cold water to remove soil.

Cutting a Sweet Pepper

1. Start by cutting a circle around the top of the pepper, following the top edge all the way around. Pull the top off by the stem and discard it. There might be a few seeds left inside the pepper, but the majority of them should be attached to the top.
2. Notice the white ribs inside of the pepper. Use these as a guide to make your cuts as you slice the pepper.
3. Start at the top of the pepper and slice down the middle of one of the ribs, making sure the cut stops at the bottom-center of the pepper. Continue slicing down each rib.
4. The pepper should be in 3-4 pieces now (depending on how many ribs it had), and the edge of each piece should have part of a white rib on it. Remove the white ribs from the edges of each piece, starting at the top and slicing in a U-shape all the way around until the rib has been removed. Now the pepper is ready to be sliced, chopped or diced.

Storing: Store unwashed bell peppers in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. They will stay fresh for about a week. Green bell peppers will stay fresh a little longer than yellow or red ones.

Cooking:

Sautéing Peppers

Heat 2 tablespoons olive or vegetable oil in a skillet over medium high heat. Add 1 sweet pepper that has been cut into strips, one small onion that is thinly sliced and ¼ teaspoon salt to the oil. Stir and cook vegetables for 7-8 minutes or until soft and golden brown. Serve as a topping for steak, hamburgers, or hot dogs.

Roasting/Grilling Sweet Peppers

To roast/grill peppers, cut a small slit near the stem of each pepper. If using an oven, broil peppers 4 inches away from heating source. Turn peppers over when the skin blisters and turns brown or black. Repeat until all sides are dark. If grilling, use a long-handled fork to hold the pepper. Turn the pepper over a flame until the skin is blackened. After skin has blackened, place the peppers

in a zip-top bag for 15 minutes to allow them to steam. Take the peppers from the bag and scrape the skin off using a table knife. Remove stem. Core, and remove seeds from the pepper. Roasted/grilled peppers add rich flavor to any dish!

Nutrition Highlights: Sweet peppers are a very good source of vitamin C, and contain beta carotene, potassium, folic acid, and dietary fiber.

Growing: Peppers prefer a sunny location, long growing season, and fertile, well-drained soil for best yields. Side dress with nitrogen fertilizer to grow a large plant. Water plants deeply and infrequently. Harvest peppers when they are fully colored and firm.

Preserving: Sweet peppers may be canned or frozen to preserve them for future use. Visit the National Center for Home Food Preservation web site, http://nchfp.uga.edu/, for instructions.

To save a pepper that that you can't use right away, consider freezing it. Prepare the peppers following the directions under Cleaning and Preparing. Then chop, dice or slice the peppers. Spread the pepper pieces in a single layer on a cookie sheet. Place the cookie sheet in the freezer for an hour or longer. When the pieces are frozen, loosen them from the cookie sheet, put them into freezer bags and place the sealed bags in the freezer. The pepper pieces will remain separated for easy measuring when you are ready to add them to chili, spaghetti sauce, or casseroles.

Spicy Stuffed Bell Peppers
Source: http://healthyliving.tamu.edu/dinner-tonight-videos/spicy-stuffed-bell-peppers.aspx

1 (15 ounce) can diced tomatoes
4-6 bell peppers
1 pound ground hamburger meat
1 packet taco seasoning
½ cup onion
1 cup cheese

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cut off top of peppers and clean out centers. Fill each bell pepper half way with water, then microwave for 6-7 minutes. Meanwhile, brown one pound ground beef with ½ cup of onion. Add the taco seasoning to the meat and cook according to package directions. Next, add the diced tomatoes and simmer for 10 minutes. Drain the water from the bell peppers; place the bell peppers in a loaf pan. Fill each bell pepper three fourths full of the meat mixture; fill the rest of the bell pepper with cheese. Pack the cheese on top of the meat mixture. Cover with foil and bake for 20 minutes or until the bell peppers become tender.

Yield: 4 – 6 servings

Nutrition Facts Per Serving:
Calories 347; Fat: 11 g, Carbohydrates: 11 g, Protein: 30 g, Sodium: 393 mg, Fiber: 3g.

Shell Pasta Salad with Veggies
Source: “What’s So Great about Peppers”

10 ounces small shell pasta
1 green bell pepper
1 red bell pepper (green bell peppers can be used as a substitute)
1 cup cucumber
2 medium carrots
1 rib celery
1 small red onion
5 radishes
1 (7 ounce) can tuna in water
1 teaspoon salt
Low-fat or no-fat salad dressing

In a large pot of water, cook pasta. Drain and rinse under cold water; chill. Dice all vegetables. Add vegetables, tuna, salt, and low-fat salad dressing (light or fat free Miracle Whip or ranch) to pasta. Mix. Makes 6 servings.

Nutrition Data: 1 cup Shell Pasta Salad
Calories 254, Total Fat 4 g, Saturated Fat .6 g, Cholesterol 1 mg, sodium 26 mg, Carbohydrate 47 g, Dietary Fiber 4 g, Protein 8 g, Vitamin A 757 RE, Calcium 27 mg, Vitamin C 40 mg, Iron 2.4 mg

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