



SIMPLY GOOD FOOD

Peppers - Banana

"Pepper" is a confusing word in the world of vegetable cookery. Many recipes refer to less mature fruits known as sweet, green, globe, bell and "mangoes" in the Midwest and have nothing to do with the fruit. These are one of the few vegetables that can be frozen without blanching. Buy when they are plentiful. Small packets of frozen chopped peppers can be counted on to add zest to many types of dishes.

Without any question, you can eat fresh peppers without removing their skins. Either halve them, remove the seeds and tissue, and cut into the size you prefer, or cut a cap off the top, remove the seeds and veins with a sharp-edged spoon, and blanch and stuff them. That is a perfectly fine way to prepare peppers for any dish. Unpeeled peppers are delicious raw in salads, cooked alone, or in combination with other vegetables and meats.

Marketing: Look for firm, shiny peppers with no signs of dehydration and good color (pale color denotes immaturity). Pick up the peppers: the lighter the pepper in relationship to its flesh, the more chance that the pepper has dehydrated.

Storage and Preserving: Whole fresh unwashed peppers will keep in the refrigerator 3-4 days. Peeled peppers stored in a covered container will keep 1-2 days.

Nutritional Information: The pepper, all types, are very high in Vitamin C.

- Hints:**
- Select thick-fleshed peppers for peeled peppers: other-wise you will find yourself with little left.
 - Remember that peeled peppers have a more intensified flavor and softer texture than unpeeled peppers.

Peeling Sweet Peppers

Start with the thickest-fleshed peppers you can find because they are easier to peel and you lose less flesh than with thin-walled peppers.

Lay the peppers in a broiler pan, and broil until their skins blister (2-3 minutes). With a tong or long fork, slightly rotate them and continue turning until the peppers are completely charred, then pop them into a paper bag. Close the bag and let the peppers sit in it for 15-20 minutes: the charred skin steams loose from the flesh. Then, holding each pepper over a bowl, slit down one side, open it up, and discard the seeds, ribs, and stem. Cut the pepper into 2-3 pieces, and peel off the loosened skin with a paring knife. The bowl collects the pepper juices, which can be used to store the peeled peppers if you wish. Or, drain the skinned and seeded peppers on a rack.

Grilled or Broiled Pepper Pieces

Halve the peppers, clean the insides, and cut into wide strips or chunks. Dip the pieces into oil. Place them on a grill or broiler pan about 4 inches from the heat. Brown one side, turn, and brown the other side. A thick-fleshed pepper will be tender in 5-6 minutes or less. If the peppers are part of a shish kebab or mixed vegetable grill, coat them or marinate in a sauce before cooking.

Note: Some people like to first parboil the peppers for 2 minutes and then oil and grill them. This is necessary only if they are immediately on top of the heat source and will be cooking quickly.

Baked Stuffed Peppers

To ensure that stuffed peppers are extra tender, give them a preliminary blanching. Clean the peppers, remove the tops, and blanch the pepper shells and tops for 4-5 minutes. Then, drain well and fill with stuffing. Bake in a preheated 375 degree oven for approximately 20 minutes or until the skins are tender and the filling is heated through.

Stuffed Pepper Suggestions:

- *Leftover Meat and Rice Stuffing:* Cook 1 cup chopped onions and 1 teaspoon chopped garlic until wilted; combine with 1 ½-2 cups cooked rice, 2 cups cooked chopped or ground meat or sliced cooked sausages, beaten egg, and salt, pepper, and herbs to taste. Blanch the pepper cases, stuff, and bake in a preheated 375 degree oven for 20 minutes until heated through. Top with buttered bread crumbs or grated cheese. Add chopped tomatoes or tomato sauce to moisten.
- *Vegetable Stuffings:* Revitalize yesterday's vegetables in stuffed peppers. Fill cases with a vegetable mixture with tomato sauce, then fill and bake as above. For a puréed version, mash vegetables such as eggplant and combine with lots of grated cheese, 2-3 beaten eggs, and fresh bread crumbs and seasonings. Stuff cases and bake as above.
- *Sausage Stuffing:* Sauté 1 cup chopped onions and 1 teaspoon garlic in 3-4 tablespoons butter. Add 1 ½ cups cubed, salted, drained, and chopped squash. Sauté until lightly browned. Combine with 1 ½-2 cups cooked sausage meat and 1 cup fresh bread crumbs. Moisten with melted butter or a beaten egg. Season to taste and stuff peppers. Bake in a preheated 375 degree oven for 20-30 minutes.

- *Rice and Herb Stuffing:* Sauté 1 cup chopped onions in olive oil until wilted. Stir in 1 cup raw rice; cook until just lightly colored, 2-3 minutes. Add 2 cups chicken broth and 1 teaspoon each sugar, salt, and allspice. Bring broth to a boil, cover pan, and simmer 15-20 minutes or until the rice is tender. Toss with 1/4 cup peeled, seeded, and chopped tomato bits if desired. Season to taste with lemon juice and pepper. Stuff pepper shells and cook as above.

- *Rice and Cheese Stuffing:* Cook rice as for preceding stuffing. Stir in a least ½ pound grated cheese. Stuff pepper cases and bake in a preheated 375 degree oven until heated through and cheese is melted (about 15 minutes).

Pepper and Cheese Bake

- 2 lb thick-fleshed peppers
- ½ lb Cheddar cheese
- ½ lb Monterey Jack cheese
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 cups chopped onions
- 2 cups corn kernels
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- Chopped fresh hot pepper (optional)
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup light cream

Peel peppers. Keep each pepper in one flat piece if possible. Drain well. Roughly grate the cheeses, and combine: you should have approximately 4 cups. Heat the butter in a sauté pan and cook the onions until wilted and golden; add corn and sauté lightly to coat with butter and remove any moisture. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Butter and 8 x 8-inch baking dish. Pat the peppers dry. Place half the peppers across the dish and sprinkle with a little chopped fresh hot pepper if you like. Top with one-third of the cheese. Spread the corn and onions over the cheese and top with one-third of the cheese. Cover with the remaining peppers. Add more chopped hot pepper if you wish, then cover with the remaining cheese. Beat eggs, combine with cream, and season with salt and pepper. Pour over the top and bake in a preheated 425 degree oven for 10 minutes; reduce the heat to 350 degrees and bake 20 minutes longer (serves 6-8)

- Omit the corn, and add more peppers.
- Substitute other sautéed vegetables, such as eggplant slices, for the corn and onions.

Supporting State Extension Goal: Health, Safety and Well Being

Prepared by: Linda S. Lynch, M.S., C.F.C.S.
CEA-FCS
Lubbock County