

## Hot Chilli Facts for you to get your teeth into

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### **Perfect pest control, from backyard to savana**

Capsaicin has long been used as a pest control by chilli plants themselves, deterring mammals from eating the pods but having no effect on birds which have a very different nervous system.

A handful of dried chilli mixed in with your birdseed will deter those pesky squirrels, leaving your garden birds to happily munch away. In Zimbabwe and parts of India farmers plant a barrier crop of chillies or smear fences with chilli to deter elephants from their crops.

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### **Burn, Baby, Burn!**

Be careful when trying new chillies, the burning sensation of some, like the Chiltepin, is quick and explosive and subsides very quickly whereas the heat of others, like the Habanero, builds very slowly. Drinking milk or placing a spoonful of yoghurt in your mouth is the best way to relieve the burning sensation of chillies as water will just spread the capsaicin oil around.

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### **What is the world's hottest chilli?**

According to the Guinness book of records, the Bhut Jolokia of Assam is the world's hottest chilli pepper, with an official Scoville rating of 1,001,304 , nearly doubling the heat of the previous record holder, the Red Savina with a rating of just 577,000. 25 year old Anandita Dutta Tamuly of Assam holds the record for eating these chillies, consuming a mouth-blistering 60 Bhut Jolokia in just 2 minutes!

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### **Capsaicin – What makes chillies hot**

Capsaicin is the active irritant in chillies that causes the burning sensation in mammals. The sensation has no lasting effect and in actual fact does no harm but tricks our central nervous system into releasing endorphins, in turn producing a pleasurable sensation in the body. This is the reason that eating a hot chilli dish can be so satisfying and why there are a growing number of "Chilli Heads" around the world.

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### **What was the world's largest curry?**

The world's largest curry was cooked up by 60 chefs in New Delhi in June 2008, a 13 tonne biryani including 187 pounds of chillies and 6600 pounds of rice and called for the use of 3 cranes and a 3 foot high furnace. The reason for making such a large curry was unclear, especially since there was no current record in the Guinness book of records to beat!

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### **What is the hottest part of a chilli?**

Contrary to popular opinion, it is not the seeds that are the hottest part of a chilli, but the white pith that surrounds them and runs in thick veins through the pod. Fresh red chillies are two to three times hotter than green fruit, and dried pods are between two and ten hotter than fresh pods. When cooking remember the golden rule, you can add but you can't take away.

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### **Are chillies the world's oldest condiment?**

There is evidence that chillies were being eaten in central and south America as long ago as 7,000 BC, making them the world's oldest condiment as well as its most ubiquitous today. The tiny, round Chiltepin pepper still grows wild around the region and were used as one of the earliest tax payments, paid to Aztec Emperors.

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### **What is the world's biggest chilli?**

Big Jim, a chilli hailing from New Mexico, is in the Guinness Book of Records as producing the biggest chilli pods, frequently producing chillies over a foot in length – quite impressive for a plant that grows no more than 2 foot tall!

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### **Chilli superfood**

It is said that chillis can help fight off winter colds and eating them certainly releases endorphins that helps lift the spirits. Chillies are packed with vitamins, containing more Vitamin C than oranges, more Vitamin A than carrots and such high levels of Vitamin D that some athletes eat them prior to exercising to reduce the risk of injury.

The active ingredient in chillies, capsaicin has been known to reduce the amount of insulin the body needs to lower blood sugar levels after a meal by up to about 60% which could be of benefit to diabetics and the overweight.

Chillies are natural anti-oxidants and can help to prevent cancer. It has long been noted that cultures that regularly consume chillies have lower than average rates of cancer. Recent tests on rats with prostate cancer showed that large doses of capsaicin caused the death of 80% of cancer cells making it a possible part of a future cure.

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### **What are Scoville Heat Units?**

Wilbur Scoville developed a method for measuring the strength of capsaicin in chillies in 1902, which meant tasting a diluted version of a pepper and giving it a value. Mild bell peppers rate at zero, jalapeño is mid range 3,500ScU Scoville and the hottest are the Bhut Jolokia at over a million and the Naga Morich which has recently tested at 1.5 million.

Today, the Scoville rating is measured by High Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC), which separates out different compounds so that capsaicin levels can be measured.

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