



By Peggy Crum, MA, RD, Health4U Nutritionist

Bell peppers, so named for their bell-like shape, are commonly called sweet peppers to distinguish them from chile peppers. All peppers are members of the nightshade family in the Capsicum genus well-known for containing capsaicin, a compound that causes a burning sensation. Since bell peppers have no capsaicin due to a recessive hot gene, they get a zero on the [Scoville scale](#) of hotness.

Often, bell peppers are sold at the green stage before they're ripe. Green peppers have a distinctly different flavor and are often bitter. As they mature, green peppers turn either red, orange, or yellow and develop a tangy, sweet flavor.

The season for Michigan-grown peppers begins in July—red peppers are a few weeks later since the green (unripe) peppers have to ripen—and continues until the first heavy frost, usually mid-October. You'll find red peppers in the grocery store year round thanks to the winter growing season in Mexico.

Choose peppers that are firm and heavy for their size with smooth, shiny skin without soft spots or wrinkles. Store them whole and unwashed in a plastic bag in the refrigerator; use within 5-7 days.

Red peppers are especially delicious when roasted and peeled. The purpose of roasting is to burn and blister the skin so it can be easily removed. A hot flame is key to blacken the skin quickly while the flesh remains firm. Put the whole pepper in close proximity to the flame of a gas burner, grill, or broiler and turn frequently to blacken the skin evenly. As the peppers are blackened, move them to a container and cover to allow steam to collect in the container and loosen the skin. When the peppers are cool enough to handle, peel off the skins. Then cut off the ends, slit along the side, and remove the seeds and pith (white part). There you have it, roasted red peppers, ready for salads, marinating, or Chef's recipe for muhammara.

RECIPE for health

JULY 2018

featured food:

RED PEPPERS

Muhammara

By Corporate Chef Kurt Kwiatkowski, Residential Dining Services

Makes about 3-4 cups, 6 to 8 servings as a dip

- 3 medium red bell peppers
- 1/2 c cooked red lentils (approximately 1/4 cup dried)
- 1 T lemon juice
- 1 T ground cumin
- 2 t kosher salt
- 1 1/2 T pomegranate molasses (available at Middle Eastern grocers)
- 2 t red pepper flakes
- 1 c walnuts, toasted
- 1/4 c diced white onion
- 2-4 T extra virgin olive oil
- 2 T chopped fresh cilantro
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Roast red peppers, wrap in paper towel and set aside to cool. When peppers are cool, remove the skin and seeds and discard. Cut the roasted pepper flesh into quarters.

Rinse lentils and cook in saucepan with enough water to cover the lentils. Simmer for 12 to 15 minutes. Drain.

Place roasted peppers, 1/2 cup cooked lentils, lemon juice, cumin, salt, molasses, red pepper flakes, walnuts, and onion in bowl of food processor. Process until smooth. With food processor running, drizzle in olive oil. To thin out the product even more, drizzle in more olive oil a tablespoon at a time. Add cilantro to bowl and pulse until herb is chopped and distributed in the dip.

Cover and refrigerate. Flavor improves with a day in the fridge. When ready to serve, bring to room temperature. Drizzle with olive oil and garnish with a sprinkle of walnuts and a few leaves of cilantro.

Serve with pita bread, pita chips, or fresh vegetables. Delicious as a sandwich spread or as a pesto-like sauce tossed with freshly cooked pasta.