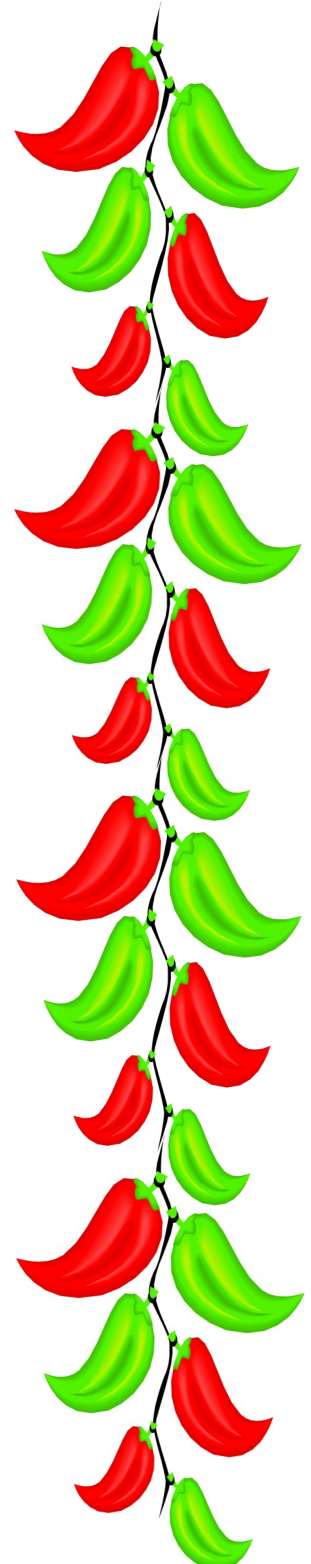




# Rate the salsa




**HOT**   **MEDIUM**   **MILD**

Chile peppers are the fruit of the plant *Capsicum* that forms part of the nightshade family (*Solanaceae*).

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The heat of chile peppers is measured in **Scoville Heat Units**. Bell peppers rank at zero SHU's, Jalapeños at 3,000–6,000 SHU's and Habaneros at 300,000 SHU's. The record for the highest number of SHU's in a pepper is assigned by the Guinness Book of Records, to the Red Savina Habanero, with

577,000 SHU's.

Pure capsaicin rates at 16,000,000 SHU's.

A US manufacturer of hot sauces has made what he claims is the most pungent chilli powder it is possible to make. The powder is so hot that Blair Lazar's customers have to sign a legal waiver before tasting it. The pure Capsaicin, 30 times hotter than the hottest pepper and 8,000 times hotter than Tabasco sauce, is distilled from several tons of fresh peppers. Capsaicin does not actually burn, instead it stimulates nerve endings in your mouth, giving the sensation of burning. Over the past decade or so, manufacturers have taken the humble chilli pepper and distilled it into ever more fiery sauces. The names of the concoctions, After Death Sauce and Insanity Sauce are just two, give some idea of the pain that is involved during and after consuming them.

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As early as 7000 BC native Indians in the New World were eating the wild "chiltecpin" (piquín) pepper. This is a small and very pungent chile eaten like peanuts today only by the brave. It is believed that chile peppers were domesticated between 5200 and 3400 B.C. by nomadic Indians dependent on the harvesting of wild plants for more than half of their food.

Chile peppers were first cultivated in South America around 2300 BC by the Incas who called them "Uchu" in the Quechua language and "Huayca" in the Aymara language. The Incas worshipped the chile pepper as one of the holy plants and used it to represent the teachings of the early kings.

Before 1500 B.C. chiles travelled north into Mexico and gained the reputation as a spicy condiment, becoming an important part of the native diet. Around this time the Olmecs, one of the first agricultural tribes, settled in what is now Veracruz in Mexico.

At about 500 B.C. the Monte Alban culture of the Zapotec Indians from the valley of Oaxaca, Mexico, began exporting to neighbouring tribes the "Suchilquitongo" bowls that resemble the handheld mortars or molcajetes. These bowls are believed to be the first evidence that people crushed chiles for chile powder.

When the Mayas reached the peak of their civilization about 500 A.D. in southern Mexico and the