



COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

BELL PEPPERS



Bell peppers are a tropical vegetable. They grow in compact bushes and are members of the Solanaceae or “nightshade” family. Bell peppers are unique in the pepper family because they do not produce capsicum, or heat like other peppers such as jalapeño or chili peppers. They are native to Central and South America. Archeologists found bell pepper seeds that are over 5,000 years old in Mexico. Spanish and Portuguese explorers introduced bell peppers to Europe in the 16th century. Today they are grown worldwide. Michigan farmers harvest bell peppers grown outside from July through October. Bell peppers grown in greenhouses are harvested throughout the year.



BELL PEPPERS ARE

- Bell peppers are an excellent source of vitamin C*. Vitamin C is important to the body’s tissues and supports a healthy immune system.
- Bell peppers are a source of fiber. Fiber helps us feel fuller and benefits the digestive and cardiovascular systems.

**Foods that are high in vitamin C, calcium and/or iron can help protect you from lead absorption.*

MICHIGAN MADE

About 900 Michigan farms grow and produce bell peppers. They are harvested by hand three to four times during the growing season once they ripen to their desired color. Popular bell pepper varieties include Aristotle, Currier, Karisma, and Michigan Wonder. Bell peppers are grown statewide, and the majority are grown in the lower half of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula.

FUN FACTS

- Bell peppers were named “bell” because they are shaped like a bell.
- Bell peppers can be green, yellow, orange, red, white, purple, black, and striped, speckled, or multi-colored.
- As bell peppers ripen, they change color and become sweeter, juicier, and softer.
- Green bell peppers are unripe and tangy. They are the firmest, have the longest shelf life, and are preferred for cooking.
- Yellow, orange, and red bell peppers are ripe, sweet and get softer as they get darker. They are preferred for eating fresh and also good for cooking.
- In addition to fresh and cooked, bell peppers are used in condiments and dried for spices.

BUYING AND STORING

- Select bell peppers with firm, shiny, smooth skin, free from blemishes.
- Store in refrigerator crisper drawer away from fruit. Whole green peppers will last up to two weeks, all other colors, about five days.
- Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables before using.

MORE THAN FRESH

In addition to fresh, bell peppers are available frozen, canned and in prepared frozen meals. When buying packaged bell peppers, be sure to read labels and choose items that are reduced or low-sodium (salt), or no salt added.

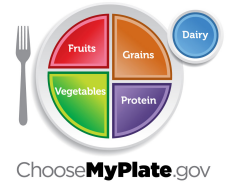




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EAT WITH MYPLATE

MyPlate focuses on whole-grains, lean protein, low-fat dairy, and half the plate being fruits and vegetables. Bell peppers are a part of the Vegetable Group. Most people need 2–3 cups of vegetables per day. For more information visit: myplate.gov.



IT ALL COUNTS

Fresh, frozen, canned, dried, and 100% vegetable and fruit juices count toward your daily MyPlate goals.

VEGETABLE QUESADILLAS

Time: 15 minutes | Makes: 4 servings | Serving Size: 1 quesadilla

Nutrition Information Per Serving: Calories 147, Carbohydrate 23g, Dietary Fiber 3g, Protein 8g, Total Fat 3g, Saturated Fat 2g, Cholesterol 1mg, Sodium 336mg

Always wash hands before preparing food. Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables before using.



INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup green bell pepper, chopped
- ½ cup whole kernel corn- fresh (1 ear), frozen, or canned (drained)
- ½ cup green onion, sliced
- ½ cup tomato, chopped
- 2 tablespoons cilantro, chopped
- 4 flour tortillas (6-inch)
- ½ cup low-fat cheese, shredded
- Nonstick cooking spray

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Coat medium skillet with nonstick cooking spray. Sauté corn and bell pepper over medium heat until softened (about 5 minutes).
2. Add tomato and green onion. Cook until heated, then stir in cilantro.
3. Heat tortillas in a separate skillet over high heat. Place equal amounts of cheese and sautéed vegetables on each tortilla. Fold each in half and continue to cook until cheese is melted. Serve hot.

TRY THIS

- Add fresh bell peppers to wraps, sandwiches, and salads for added color and crunch.
- Just slice and eat. Bell peppers are great for snacking and go well with dips and spreads.
- Sautéed green peppers and onions are a popular topping combination that adds flavor and nutrients to eggs, pizzas, fajitas, quesadillas, burgers, hot dogs, and submarine sandwiches.

CHANGE IT UP

- Add grilled chicken, pork, beef, fish, black beans, or scrambled eggs for added protein.
- Top each quesadilla with 1 tablespoon of salsa and 1 tablespoon Greek yogurt.
- Make crispy quesadillas. Spray a baking sheet three times with cooking spray, lay folded quesadillas on baking sheet, bake for 8 minutes in a 425 F oven, flip gently and cook for 8 more minutes, and serve.