

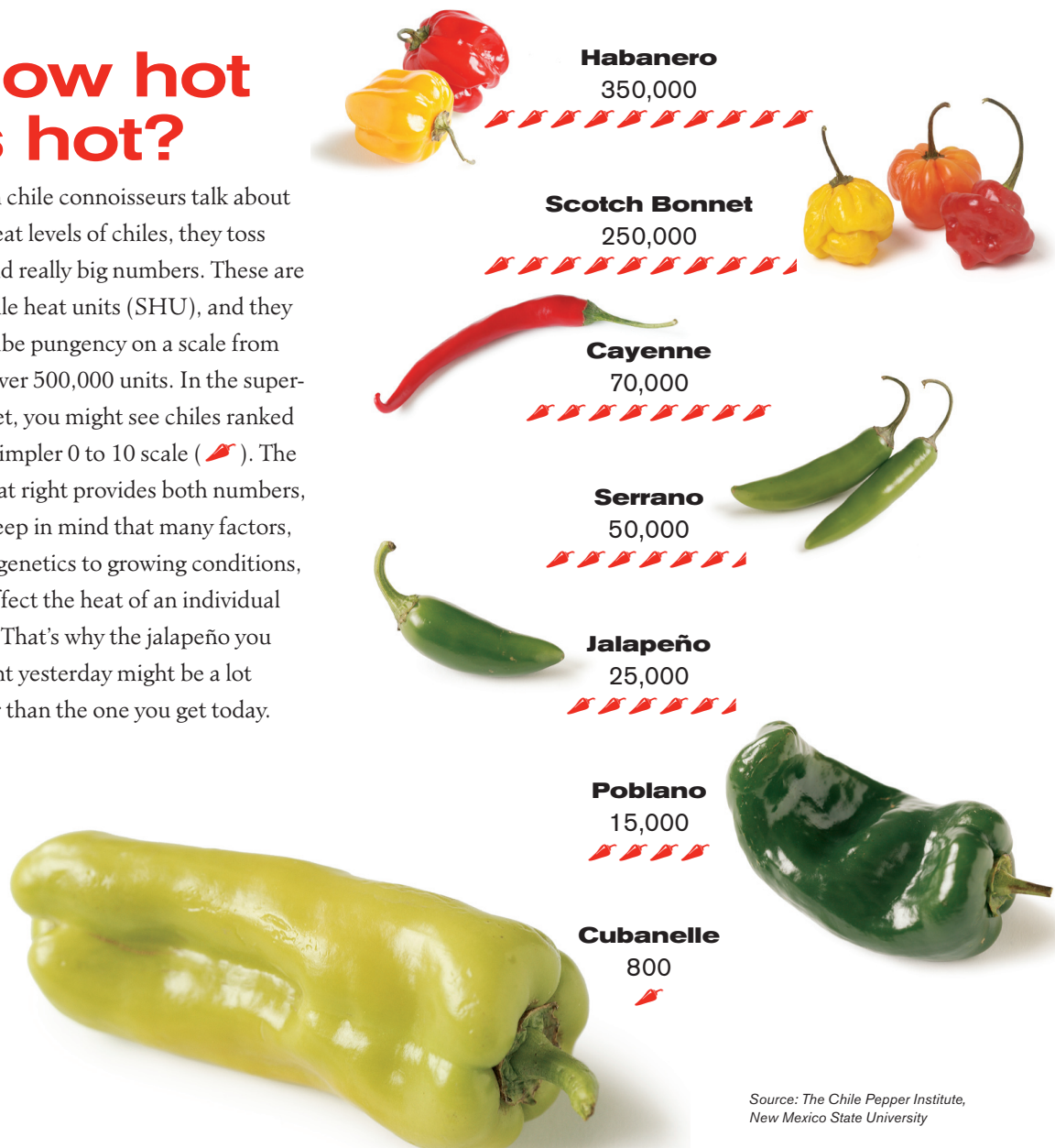
# Guide to Fresh and Dried Chiles

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Get past the heat, and you'll discover that different types of chiles have wonderfully varied flavor profiles; ripening, drying, smoking, or roasting further heightens the differences in taste. Use our heat scale and shopping guide (next page) to learn how to add a jolt of chile to your cooking—and learn the techniques of roasting and seeding in two bonus recipes.

## How hot is hot?













When chile connoisseurs talk about the heat levels of chiles, they toss around really big numbers. These are Scoville heat units (SHU), and they describe pungency on a scale from 0 to over 500,000 units. In the supermarket, you might see chiles ranked on a simpler 0 to 10 scale (🌶️). The table at right provides both numbers, but keep in mind that many factors, from genetics to growing conditions, will affect the heat of an individual chile. That's why the jalapeño you bought yesterday might be a lot tamer than the one you get today.



Source: The Chile Pepper Institute, New Mexico State University

Photos: Scott Phillips, except where noted.

# A fresh and dried chile buying guide

Fresh Names	Dried Names	Appearance	Flavor /Uses
<b>Jalapeño</b> 	<b>Chipotle</b> A chipotle is a ripened, smoke-dried jalapeño. 	About 3 inches long, with thick-walled, crunchy flesh. They're usually sold when medium to dark green, but ripened red jalapeños can be found in the fall.	The fresh chile has a strong, vegetal flavor and medium heat, and it's used in salsas or pickled. Chipotles have a sweet, smoky flavor and are often canned in a sweet, tomato-based sauce called adobo
<b>Serrano</b> 	Not commonly available in dried form.	A bit smaller than a jalapeño, with a narrower stem end and medium-thick walls. Sold as green or mature red chiles.	Very hot, with a fuller, more herbaceous flavor than jalapeños. Great for salsas and for flavoring casseroles, stews, or egg dishes.
<b>Poblano</b> Fresh or dried poblanos are often called pasillas on the West Coast, but this is incorrect: the pasilla is an entirely different chile. 	<b>Ancho</b> An ancho is a ripened, dried poblano. 	Fat, wide, and glossy, dark green, the poblano is one of the most commonly used chiles in Central Mexican cooking, both fresh and dried.	Medium to mild heat. Fresh poblanos are often roasted, peeled, and cut into strips ( <i>rajas</i> ) to flavor tacos, fajitas, or quesadillas. Anchos have a sweet, fruity flavor and are an important ingredient in <i>mole</i> sauce.
<b>Pasilla</b> Also known as chilaca chile. The pasilla is not the same as the poblano or ancho. 	<b>Chile Negro</b> The name "pasilla" is used for both fresh and dried, but another name for the dried form is chile negro. 	Skin tends to be more wrinkled than poblanos, even when fresh. Pod shapes vary, but tend to be narrower than poblanos. Though pasillas ripen to a brown color instead of red, the fresh chiles are most often available in their immature, dark-green stage.	The fresh chiles are mild and raisin-like ( <i>pasilla</i> means "little raisin" in Spanish) and can be chopped and added to vegetables, soups, or stews. Dried pasillas, another component of <i>mole</i> sauce, have a deep, complex flavor, including berry, tobacco, and licorice tones.
<b>Anaheim</b> Also called New Mexico or simply green chiles. 	<b>Chile Colorado</b> Ripened, dried Anaheims are called chile colorado or New Mexico chiles. 	Long, narrow, and tapered light green peppers with thick, juicy flesh.	Mild heat with a green, vegetal flavor. Often used for chile rellenos or <i>rajas</i> . The dried Anaheim's mild, crisp heat and earthy flavor with tones of dried cherry are perfect for seasoning chili and other stews.
<b>Habanero</b> 	Not commonly available in dried form.	Small, orange, lantern-shaped peppers with a pointed blossom end. Sometimes confused with Scotch Bonnets, which are squatter and pack a little less heat.	Very, very hot, with fruity overtones. A classic ingredient in Caribbean and South American barbecue marinades, pastes, and fiery table sauces, it also adds a wonderful heat to fruit-based salsas.
<b>Thai</b> Also known as bird chiles. 	Not commonly available in dried form.	Tiny, slender, and thin-walled, they're sometimes available green but are more often lipstick-red.	Very hot, with a nutty flavor. Perfect for all kinds of stir-frying. Easy to air-dry for year-round use.
<b>Cayenne</b> 	Dried cayenne is most commonly available in U.S. grocery stores in ground form.	Narrow, thin-walled pods 3 to 5 inches long. Available both green and red-ripened.	Very hot, especially in its ripened form. The most common chile in Indian cuisine.





## Poblano & Ham Quesadillas

*Yields 8 quesadillas.*

This is a great, simple appetizer or light supper that uses strips of roasted poblanos that are also known as rajas.

- ½ pound mozzarella, grated (to yield 2 cups)**
- 8 very thin slices Serrano ham, prosciutto, or other good cured ham**
- 8 to 10 ounces fresh poblanos, roasted, peeled, seeded (see the method below left), and cut into ¼-inch strips (to yield about ⅔ cup)**
- 8 small (5½- to 6-inch) flour tortillas**
- 4 teaspoons unsalted butter**

Distribute the cheese, ham, and poblano strips equally over one half of each of the flour tortillas. Fold the tortillas in half. In a 10-inch skillet, heat 1 teaspoon of the butter over medium heat. When the butter starts to bubble, add two of the folded tortillas and toast until the cheese melts and the tortilla is crisp, 2 to 3 minutes, flipping halfway through. Repeat with the remaining butter and quesadillas. Serve piping hot.

**IDEA:** Roasted poblano or Anaheim strips, called rajas, taste great in a melted cheese snack—just combine the chiles with Monterey Jack or mozzarella in a small ovenproof dish and set under the broiler until the cheese bubbles. Serve on crusty bread or tortillas.

—Robb Walsh,  
Fine Cooking #73

## Roast fresh chiles for the best flavor—here's how

You can use these techniques for poblanos, Anaheims, and jalapeños. It doesn't work well with habaneros or other tiny, hot chiles.



### Char first...

For one or two peppers (gas stoves only): Coat each chile with a little vegetable oil. Roast a chile directly on the grate of a gas stove over high heat, turning occasionally until it's charred all over.

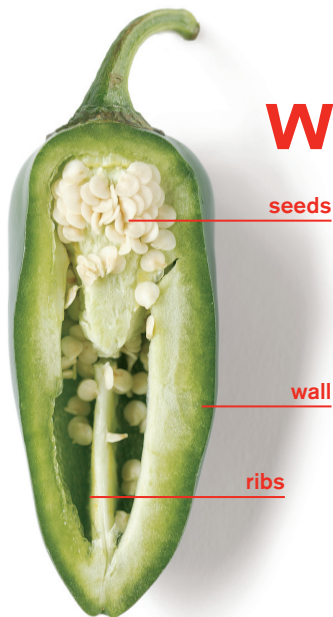
For a batch of peppers (gas or charcoal grills; gas or electric stoves): Coat each chile with a little vegetable oil. Grill over a hot charcoal fire or gas grill, covered. Or put the oiled chiles on a foil-lined baking sheet and broil as close to the element as possible, turning the chiles so they char evenly.

### ...then steam, peel, and seed

Put the charred chiles in a bowl while they're still hot and cover with plastic. Let them rest until they're cool enough to handle, 15 to 30 minutes. Pull on the stem: the seed core will pop out. Cut the chile open, flick off any seeds, and turn skin side up. With a paring knife, scrape away the charred skin. Don't rinse the chiles; you'll dilute their flavor.

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## Where the heat is

One of the great chile myths is that the seeds contain the heat, but it's just not true. The fire in chiles comes from capsaicin, one of several pungent compounds produced in tiny glands located between the pod wall and the white spongy ribs. When you cut a chile, the knife ruptures capsaicin glands, and capsaicin spills onto the seeds, which can make them taste hot despite the fact that they themselves don't produce the fiery chemical.

When working with chiles, be sure to keep the capsaicin off your hands; it can linger on your skin and come back to haunt you later if you rub your eyes. The best way to prevent this is to wear a disposable rubber glove on the hand that holds the chile. To reduce the heat of a chile, cut it in half lengthwise, scrape away the seeds and ribs with a small spoon or paring knife, and rinse well.

Every chile is hot in its own unique way because each variety contains a unique blend of capsaicinoids. (If you eat chiles regularly, your palate will develop and, as with wine or coffee, you can actually become something of a connoisseur.)

Capsaicin is a very stable compound, so there isn't much a cook can do to douse its fire. But by roasting a chile, you can intensify the other flavors lingering in the fruit so that heat isn't the only thing your taste buds notice.

If your mouth does end up on fire from overdosing on chiles, don't reach for water. It will spread the capsaicin around in your mouth, but it won't put out the flames. Instead reach for a glass of milk or a spoonful of sour cream, yogurt, or ice cream. Casein, a protein in milk, seems to strip capsaicin from the nerve receptors in your mouth.

—Kimberly Y. Masibay, senior editor

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### Sweet Corn Relish with Avocado, Jalapeño & Cilantro

Serves four.

Spoon a generous amount of this relish on top of grilled fish or chicken breasts. Add a green salad for a simple, tasty meal.

**Kernels from 3 large ears corn (about 2½ cups)**  
**1 small red onion (about 6 ounces), cut into ⅛-inch dice**  
**½ fresh jalapeño, cored, seeded, and minced**  
**3 tablespoons fresh lime juice; more to taste**  
**1 teaspoon Champagne vinegar or white-wine vinegar**  
**Kosher salt**  
**½ avocado, pit removed**  
**⅓ cup chopped fresh cilantro**  
**3 tablespoons olive oil**

Bring a small pot of water to a boil. Add the corn kernels and blanch for 1 minute. Drain.

In a medium bowl, combine the onion, jalapeño, lime juice, vinegar, and a generous pinch of salt.

Dice the avocado: Use a paring knife to carefully make ¼-inch slices through the flesh without piercing the skin. Rotate the avocado 90 degrees and slice again, to create ¼-inch squares. With the avocado in the palm of your hand, slide a large metal spoon between the skin and flesh and gently scoop out the squares.

Add the avocado pieces, corn kernels, and cilantro to the onion mixture. Add the olive oil and another pinch of salt and stir gently. Season to taste, adding more salt or lime juice as needed.

—Tasha Prys DeSerio,  
 Fine Cooking #52

