

CHILE IS  
THEIR MUSE



PHOTOS BY CARLOS JAVIER SANCHEZ — SUN-NEWS

Pok S. Hejmanowski sells aprons, potholders, tortilla warmers, casserole carriers with chile designs and other items at the Las Cruces Farmers and Craft Market.

# Artists incorporate a little spice into their work

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**LAS CRUCES** » It's our official state vegetable, our official state question (red or green?) and the basis for many of our favorite breakfast, lunch, dinner and fiesta dishes. And for many of our artists and craftspersons, especially this time of year, chile is a muse.

Our beloved hot peppers are the inspiration for everything from paintings and fine art photography to jewelry, household accessories, textiles and Christmas tree ornaments.

Many would contend that the growing of chile and making of salsas, spices and culinary concoctions is as much an art as the cultivation of grapes and fine wine. Sample your favorites at local markets and fiestas and see if you agree.

Some artisans take an organic approach to their chile art and go directly to the source.

"We grow everything in our ristras but the raffia," said Lorenzo Rubio, displaying family masterpieces Saturdays at the Las Cruces Farmers and Crafts Market.

Lorenzo's mom, Genevieve Rubio, takes the family's home-grown gourds, seed corn and colorful dried statice flowers and uses them to ornament the ristras she makes in various sizes. She also comes up with some other artistic variations on the traditional ristra theme, including a pretty arrangement of small red peppers in a natural gourd vase.

Chile-themed items are a year-round best-seller for Pok S. Hejmanowski, of TLC Crafts, who's been sewing for more than 40 years and reports, like many LCFCM vendors, that her chile items are particularly hot during chile harvest times.

And she offers lots of chile items, sewn from a variety of chile-patterned fabrics she's discovered during her two decades at the market.

Her creations include chile aprons, tortilla warmers, potholders, chile-shaped tubes made from chile-patterned fabrics that are designed to hold recycled plastic bags and little chile purses to hold cell phones and mad money. She also creates some unique specialty items, like a fabric cozy the promises to cook your baked potatoes to perfection in a microwave, which is available, like a variety of custom items, in the chile fabric of your choice.

Artist Yolanda Jaramillo said chiles and roosters are hot sellers when it comes to motifs for her painted glassware. Her current LCFCM offerings include shot glasses, wine glasses, olive-

oil bottles and salt and pepper shakers painted with red or green chiles and sometimes both.

"A lot of people from out of state want them," Jaramillo said.

Cochise Martinez offers a variety of chile-shaped plaques and wall-hangings, and whimsical signs, all featuring a mischievous chile character he invented. He also has a line of chile magnets, he said.

A merry red chile in a sombrero dances on a chile-shaped "Mi casa es tu casa" sign. Other chiles wish onlookers a hot day, invite visitors to the kitchens of grandma, mom or others.

"I make chiles and crosses, and I've sold to people all over the world. People from Germany especially seem to like the chiles," Martinez said

Diane Black, of New Mexico Soap Company, creates pastel soaps in the shape of red and green chile pods to make your daily ablutions more exciting.

"It's a little spicy," said Black.

Demands for Black's chile and pecan-shaped soaps at her LCFCM booth on Wednesdays and Fridays is "usually seasonal, but out-of-towners and people who want them for gift baskets buy them all the time," Black said.

Several market fine art photographers offer breathtaking photos of chiles, especially Mike Groves, who is known for his eloquent portraits of Hatch chile harvests, ristras on adobe doorways and chiles drying on rooftops.

To see more chile-inspired works by regional artists, keep an eye out for paintings, sculptures and multimedia works at regional galleries, museums and shops, as well as the Las Cruces Farmers and Crafts Market on Wednesdays and Saturdays on Main Street Downtown, Mesilla Mercado Fridays and Sundays on the Mesilla Plaza, an at regional festivals with chile themes, including Hatch Chile Festival, Aug. 30 through Sept. 1, the Whole Enchilada Festival Sept. 26 through 28 and NMSU's new Project Discovery, an evening of music dance and science celebrating chiles, at 7:30 p.m. Sept. 19 at Atkinson Recital Hall.

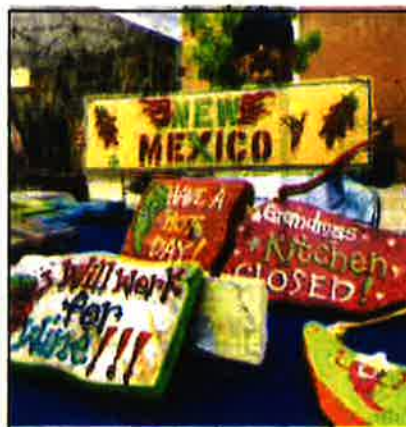
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Lorenzo Rubio sells chile ristras that his mother Genevieve Rubio ornaments with statice, seed corn and gourds at the Las Cruces Farmers and Craft Market on Saturdays.



Yolanda Jaramillo of TJM Arts and Crafts sell Yolanda's hand-painted chile-themed glasses, salt and pepper shakers, and olive oil bottles at the Las Cruces Farmers and Craft Market.



Cochise Martinez sells chile-themed wood plaques and signs at the Las Cruces Farmers and Craft Market.



Diane Black of the New Mexico Soap Company sells chile and pecan soaps at the Las Cruces Farmers and Craft Market.

**+** **Online:** To watch videos of unique chile-inspired arts and crafts, view this story at [LCSUN-NEWS.COM](http://LCSUN-NEWS.COM).