

## Ghost chile: Fiery sauce wins pair of 1st-place trophies at '09 Zest Fest Fort Worth

By Victor R. Martinez / El Paso Times

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LAS CRUCES -- The heat level of chiles is technically determined by geneticists in white lab coats. But the real measure of how hot a pepper is comes from the reaction of the person biting into it.

And depending on the Scoville units of the pepper, reactions vary from a red face to tears pouring down your cheeks.

Some peppers high on the Scoville chart can leave chileheads sucking air over their tongue, coughing and, in extreme cases, getting swollen eyes.

One such pepper, the Bhut Jolokia or the Ghost Chile -- the world's hottest pepper -- has a Scoville Heat rating of 1 million units. In comparison, Tabasco has a heat rating of 1,500 Scoville units, and the habanero chile has a rating of 33,000. It is supposed to be 200 times hotter than a jalapeño.

The Chile Pepper Institute at New Mexico State University and CaJohn's Fiery Foods have joined forces to create Holy Jolokia hot sauce made from the Bhut Jolokia.

"It doesn't look that dangerous really," Paul Bosland, the director of the Chile Pepper

Institute said, pointing to the orangish-red, triangular short-tailed pepper. "It comes from the habanero family and it has a delayed heat. Almost everybody who tastes the Bhut Jolokia says the first bite is not too hot, but then they take a second bite and when the first bite kicks in, we've lost you."

Some say the pain is so exquisite that it's like having your tongue hit with a hammer.

Bosland's research led to the Bhut Jolokia being named the hottest chile pepper in the world, according to Guinness World Records.

But the Holy Jolokia hot sauce is all about flavor, not melt-your-face-off heat.

"The Holy Jolokia is not really that hot," Bosland said of the hot Louisiana-style sauce. "We wanted a quality product that would taste good. There is more to chile than just heat. There is the complexity and levels of flavor that Holy Jolokia can bring out."

That is where John Hard, the owner of CaJohn's Fiery Foods, comes in.

"The first time I tried a fresh Bhut Jolokia, it was about 20 minutes of agony and about 20 minutes of ecstasy," he said. "I don't know if it was from the endorphins or the fact that the pain was finally gone."

Hard, who has been in the chile pepper business since 1996, considers himself a habanero specialist, so working with the Bhut Jolokia pod

was a new experience.

"We had worked with dried chile powder before, but there is nothing like working with fresh pods," he said. "This sauce has both fresh pod and dried pepper in it to get a deeper flavor profile. We chose to put it with the Louisiana-style sauce so that it would reach in to the table sauce area of Tabasco."

Hard said that with the sauce coming out of a bottle people are familiar with, it makes it more user friendly.

"People are not so reluctant to put them on soups, stews, fried foods," he said. "Dr. Bosland wanted something that was not all about killing people or burning them up, but he wanted a lot of flavor. It was an exceptional chile to work with because of its citrusy notes, so it was real easy to blend it into the Louisiana style."

The Holy Jolokia, which won two first-place trophies in the hot-sauce category at the 2009 Zest Fest Fort Worth, is the only hot sauce on the market that uses 100 percent Bhut Jolokia.

"We use 40 percent chile, and the other 60 percent is herbs, spices and vinegar," Hard said of ingredients in the sauce. "The average hot sauce is 16 to 20 percent chile, so this has more than double the average hot sauce, and the only chile in there is the Bhut Jolokia."

Daniel Guerra, a chef and instructor at El Paso Community College, combined the Holy Jolokia with blackberry for a demi-glacé used for a rack

of lamb and as an ingredient in a chocolate mousse.

"The sauce was very good," he said. "It wasn't so spicy where you couldn't handle it. It was pretty well balanced. I enjoy doing the sweet and the savory. It's fun to play with something so spicy and incorporating it with the sweetness of the desserts."

Bosland, the Chile Pepper Institute director, said that he really doesn't like the really hot hot sauce but that the Holy Jolokia is exceptional.

"I always recommend one drop just to see how you like it, then two drops, then three drops," he said. "But don't do it all at once. It has a very nice initial flavor, a very nice aftertaste, and it really has a nice complexity that we are looking for in this hot sauce."

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#### Holy Jolokia

**What:** Holy Jolokia hot sauce is made with the Bhut Jolokia pepper — or the Ghost Chile. The Bhut Jolokia is the world's hottest pepper with a Scoville heat rating of 1 million units. In comparison, Tabasco has a heat rating of 1,500 Scoville units and the habanero has a rating of 33,000. It is considered to be 200 times hotter than jalapeño pepper.

**Development:** Paul Bosland, the director of the Chile Pepper Institute at New Mexico State University, tested this pepper from India and determined its Scoville heat rating to be of 1 million units, making it the hottest pepper in the world.

**Buy it:** Holy Jolokia is available at Plaza News Gift Shop on the ground floor of the El Paso International Airport, the NMSU Bookstore and Solamente De Mesilla at 2209 Calle De Parian, Mesilla. It can also be purchased online at [www.madeinnewmexico.com](http://www.madeinnewmexico.com), [www.chilepepperinstitute.org](http://www.chilepepperinstitute.org) or [www.cajohns.com](http://www.cajohns.com).

**Cost:** \$10 for a 5-ounce bottle. A portion of the money will be used to raise funds for an endowed chair to continue the legacy of NMSU's chile pepper research and to establish a new expanded Chile Pepper Institute facility featuring a tourist venue, conference, seminar and teaching rooms, a sustainable teaching and demonstration garden, plus a state-of-the-art greenhouse.

# Holy Jolokia sauce packs heat, flavor

By Victor R. Martinez / For the Sun-News

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