

# PUNCH UP THE HOLIDAYS WITH HEALTHY CHILES

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LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

**T**hey're bright red and green, spicy, hot, savory and sometimes even sweet. And they're good for you.

What could be a better gift and treat for yourself and others than chiles for the holidays?

You'll find cheery red chile wreaths and ristras decorating our front doors and kitchens, welcoming us to holiday brunches and buffets, where chiles can star in everything from wine to omelets and traditional New Mexico treats such as tamales, enchiladas and rellenos.

They appear in gift baskets and holiday snacks, including spiced nuts, jams and jellies.

They inspire arts and crafts, such as chile field paintings and chile pod Santas, and angels on our Christmas trees.

Chile treats and decor are at regional stores, seasonal bazaars and outdoor markets this time of year and you can ship fresh and frozen chile, ristras and prepared chile treats throughout the world through locally based businesses.

Fans of the official New Mexico state vegetable include New Mexico State University Regents Professor of Horticulture Paul Bosland, director of NMSU's Chile Pepper Institute, who compares chiles to fine wines and has said he consumes them at every meal.

"Because chile peppers are healthy and there are so many shapes, sizes, flavors and heat levels, everybody should be eating them," Bosland said.

He has a lot of support. Researchers have dubbed chiles a kind of miracle food that can elevate our mood and metabolism, ease our aches and pains, clear our sinuses and arteries, positively affect heart and blood vessel health, and provide a surprising amount of vitamins and nutrition. One green chile pepper has as much vitamin C as six oranges and a red pepper can provide your daily vitamin A needs.

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**Top right:** Ornamental potted chiles are available for purchase at the NMSU Chile Institute. Available varieties include Nu Mex Christmas, featuring both red and green chiles.

**Bottom right:** Chiles are a staple of both holiday decor and cuisine.

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## Sources for chile gifts and treats

- **Chile Pepper Institute**, 8 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, Gerald Thomas Hall, room 265, corner of College and Knox streets on NMSU campus, [chilepepperinstitute.org](http://chilepepperinstitute.org), 575-646-3028. The institute offers information, seeds, posters, books, CDs, guides, research articles, chile plants, frozen and packaged chile food products, chile-themed clothing, calendars and other merchandise.

- **Las Cruces Farmers & Crafts Market**, 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesdays and Saturdays on Main Street in Downtown Las Cruces. Chile ristras, wreaths, ornaments, spices, salsas, jams, chile-spiced nuts and other treats, chile-themed kitchen and household accessories.

- **Mesilla Mercado**, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Fridays and noon to 4 p.m. Sundays on the Mesilla Plaza, sometimes features vendors with chile products, and shops on and around the plaza have some gourmet chile goodies, that range from chile fudge to jams and nut mixes.

- **New Mexico Catalog**, based in Fairacres, [nmcatalog.com](http://nmcatalog.com), 575-525-0585, ships fresh and frozen roasted green chiles, chile ristras, wreaths, centerpieces and swags, heat-and-eat chile feasts and samplers.

- **The Truck Farm**, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, 645 S. Alameda Blvd., [sweethots.com](http://sweethots.com), 1-800-214-6639. Gourmet chile salsas and sauces, nuts, powers, spices, mixes, candies, chile product gift baskets.

- **Ristramnn Chile Company**, 2531 Avenida de Mesilla, 575-526-8667. Fresh green and red chile in season, salsa, bottled salsa, red chile powder and spices.

- **Search online** with keywords "fresh chile peppers" or "chile products" to find other regional sources.

# Chile

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They may even aid in avoiding those holiday binges by helping to curb appetite and rev up your metabolism. A piquant pepper just might be able to help you resist those cookies and calorie-laden drinks.

If you'd like some inspiration for imaginative chile gifts, visit the Chile Pepper Institute for Chile Education, open from 8 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday in room 265 at NMSU's Gerald Thomas Hall, at the corner of College and Knox streets. For information, call 575-646-3028 or visit online at [chilepepperinstitute.org](http://chilepepperinstitute.org).

The institute offers information, seeds, posters, books, CDs, guides, research articles, chile plants, packaged chile food products, chile-themed clothing and other merchandise, including chile keychains and red and green chile-scented candles.

"We also have frozen chile, our award-winning Holy Jolokia Salsa, Dr. B's Bhut-Kickin' Brownie mix and our new calendar will feature flavor profiles for different chiles," Annette Enriquez, student aide, said.

Check out the institute's 2016 calendar, which emphasizes the hottest trend for chile aficionados, which may surprise many by de-emphasizing heat competitions. Chile appreciation is becoming more like wine tasting than a fiery combat sport, with discerning pepper fans. Trending now with cool chile connoisseurs: savoring and comparing subtle chile flavors, rather than seeing who can find and devour the hottest chiles.

Gourmet sauce and salsa competition is getting more sophisticated, too.

"Some of our most popular items are Besito Caliente (an award-winning blackberry-habañero sauce) and Cherry A'More (cherries and chipotle chiles), but people want all kinds of chile things," said Justin Hawman, who with his dad Jim Hawman, owns The Trunk Farm, which has a store at 645 S. Alameda Blvd., that's open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday.

At the store and online, the Hawmans' offerings range from Tia Rita's red and green chile powders, and chile no-salt blends to mixes for chile stews and corn breads and specialty products from other manufacturers, like green chile brittle and red and green chile pecans. They also put together some interesting chile-centric gift baskets. For information, visit [sweethots.com](http://sweethots.com) or call 1-800-214-



ANAYSSA VASQUEZ / SUN-NEWS

Student aides Annette Enriquez, left, and Natalie Cueto look over some of their favorite chile books at the NMSU's Chile Institute.

### Some health benefits of chile peppers

**Nutrition:** A teaspoon of red chile meets the recommended daily allowance for vitamin A. One green chile pod has as much vitamin C as six oranges. Chile peppers are rich in vitamins E and B complex.

**Pain relief:** Capsaicin creams made from chile can help with pain. Anti-inflammatory effects benefit those with arthritis, and are used in patches for sore, aching muscles. It clears sinuses.

**Physical effects:** Chile decreases cholesterol

absorption, so more is expelled from the body. Chile peppers increase the enzymes responsible for fat metabolism in the liver. Chile burns calories by triggering a thermodynamic burn, which speeds up metabolism.

**Odds and ends:** Chiles help treat hypothermia, frostbite and heartburn. Chile preparations aid in many skin conditions, including psoriasis, itchiness and bruising.

Sources: Paul Bosland and Danise Coon of the Chile Pepper Institute at NMSU, "The Healing Power of Peppers" by Dave DeWitt, Melissa T. Stock, and Kellye Hunter

jams, chile ornaments, novelty items, candies, nuts and chile-themed household accessories are available at the Las Cruces Farmers and Crafts Market, from 8:30 to 1 p.m. Saturdays and Wednesdays on Main Street downtown.

The Mesilla Mercado, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Fridays and noon to 4 p.m. Sundays on the Mesilla Plaza, sometimes features vendors with chile products, and shops on and around the plaza have some gourmet chile goodies, too.

If you're in the mood for a little road trip, shops in Hatch, which bills itself as the Chile Capital of the World, offering unique chile goodies you're unlikely to find anywhere else ... at least within one small village.

If you'd like some ideas for making your own chile gifts and treats, the NMSU/Doña Ana Cooperative Extension office, 530 N. Church St., offers free information, including pamphlets on making ristras, chile recipes, and chile cultivation and preservation. Hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. For information, call 575-525-6649 or visit online at [donaanaextension.nmsu.edu](http://donaanaextension.nmsu.edu).

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6639.

New Mexico Catalog, based in Fairacres, just outside of Las Cruces, ships fresh and frozen roasted green chile throughout the United States and around the world. They also create and ship imaginative chile ristras, wreaths, centerpieces and swags, some of which are Southwestern fusion masterpieces incorporating Indian corn, cotton and other desert materials.

They'll also ship heat-and-eat chile feasts and samplers that feature chile-laden treats like tamales, burritos, rellenos, enchiladas and salsas. To order or for information, visit [nmcatalog.com](http://nmcatalog.com) or call 575-525-0585.

"We offer just about anything related to chile. We're about the last in the region each year to offer fresh green chile and then, in November, we're slammed with people who want dried red chile for chile tamales for the holidays," said Chris Alexander of Ristramnn Chile Company, 2531 Avenida de Mesilla, which also offers red and green chile powder, spices and salsas.

For information, call 575-526-8667.

If you plan to use chiles for both cooking and decor, make sure that wreaths and ristra chiles are not painted or treated with varnish or preservatives.

A variety of fresh ristras, wreaths and packaged and bottled chile products,