

The Lukewarm Chile Peppers

By **BILL PAPICII**
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

LAS CRUCES, N.M.—Move over, chicken hot dogs, sugar-free sweets, light beer and fat-free potato chips. Now there are jalapeños with no heat.

The bite-less jalapeño is a burning issue in chile pepper country, where some chileheads are fuming because plant breeders have figured a way to remove the fire from their favorite fruit.

The traditional jalapeño hits between 3,500 and 4,500 range on the Scoville scale, which measures how hot chile peppers taste. The renegade jalapeño rates at or near zero. (The hottest chile ever tested was a habanero that registered 577,000 units.)

New Mexico chileheads confront the mild jalapeño menace.

Perhaps most frustrating to chile hot-heads is that they can't point their pods at a particular plant-breeding villain. Several breeders take credit for developing chilly jalapeños.

"There is some method behind the madness," says Paul Bosland, chief chile breeder and plant geneticist at New Mexico State University at Las Cruces.

"My dubious plan all along has been to make chiles mild. Everyone begins eating

them; then I make them hotter. Everyone will eat more and, before you know it, everyone is eating the hottest ones."

For his Nu-Mex Primavera variety, a jalapeño with no detectable heat in a taste test, Bosland received a 1999 Ig Nobel award at Harvard University. The award was one of several handed out in honor of people "who have done remarkably goofy things—some of them admirable, some perhaps otherwise."

One who believes this definitely belongs in the "otherwise" category is chef Martin Rios of Old House restaurant in Santa Fe, who received this year's New Mexico Hospitality Chef of the Year Award, the state's highest culinary award.

"If I'm going to make salsa with no heat

Please see Peppers, H2



Plant breeder Paul Bosland chomps down on one of his cool peppers.

BILL P.

RECIPE INDEX

BREADS

New York Corn Muffins, H4

BREAKFAST

Huevos con Nopalitos, H5

Molletes, H5

Scrambled Egg and Chorizo

Quesadilla, H5

MAIN DISHES

Derby Steaks, H6

Media Noche Sandwiches, H6

Orange-Sesame Glazed

Barbecue Chicken, H4

Spring Veggie Sandwiches, H6

White Wine-Marinaded Grilled

Chicken Breasts With Garden

Tomatoes and Basil, H5

SIDE DISHES

Refried Black Beans, H5

Frijoles de la Olla, H5

BEVERAGES

Rim-for-the-Roses

Mint Juleps, H6

TASTINGS

California produces

more than **800**

Chardonnays. There's sure

to be one for you. H4

FARMERS MARKETS

Thirty-five kinds of sprouts at the Westlake market. H2



AL SEIB / Los Angeles Times

Orange-Sesame Glazed Barbecue Chicken.
See Culinary SOS, H4.

DEPARTMENTS

Cookbook Hot List H2

Cookbook Watch H2

Cookstuff H6

Datebook H2

Farmers Markets H2

Forklore H2

What Are You Drinking? H4

Wine of the Week H4

FOOD IN THE TIMES

In this week's **Sunday Magazine**, grapefruit, the Cinderella of citrus. Also, a review of *Olio e Limone* in Santa Barbara.

HOW TO REACH US

The **Food** section:

Phone: (213) 237-7788

Fax: (213) 237-7355

E-mail: food@latimes.com

U.S. mail: **Food Section, Los Angeles**

Times, Times Mirror Square,

Los Angeles, CA 90053

Darrell Yasukochi had sugary white corn from the Kitagawa farm in Thermal, along with spinach, long Asian eggplant and hot green jalapeños. Chris White of Jazzy Sprouts, who plays jazz drums and serves in the Army Reserve when she's not farming in Reseda, sold radish, pea, sunflower and buckwheat greens and 35 kinds of sprouts.

Norman Fisher of Upper Ojai had Hass avocados, in various sizes and stages of ripeness. He said that at this time of year the large ones are best because they've been on the tree longest and have developed the most oil, but a medium-size fruit he selected could not have been tastier.

Westlake Village farmers market, 32129 Lindero Canyon Road, Sundays 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. (The market may move in a few weeks to the Westlake Village Inn on Agoura Road.)

—DAVID KARP

Los Angeles Times Cookbook Artist

	Last Week	Weeks on List		Last Week	Weeks on List
1. "Julia and Jacques Cooking at Home" by Julia Child and Jacques Pépin (Alfred Knopf, \$40). <i>A spirited kitchen conversation between two great cooks.</i>	3	31	6. "Dr. Atkins' Quick and Easy New Diet Cookbook" by Robert C. Atkins and Veronica C. Atkins (Fireside \$14). <i>Another from the best selling diet author.</i>	8	5
2. "The Cake Mix Doctor" by Anne Byrn (Workman, \$14.95). <i>How to turn a box cake into something special.</i>	1	11	7. "The Herbfarm Cookbook" by Jerry Traunfeld (Scribner, \$40). <i>Recipes from the highly praised Washington restaurant.</i>	7	2
3. "The French Laundry Cookbook" by Thomas Keller, Michael Ruhlman and Susie Heller (Artisan, \$60). <i>The International Assn. of Culinary Professionals' best cookbook of the year.</i>	2	24	8. "The Best Recipe" by the editors of Cook's Illustrated magazine (Boston Common Press, \$29.95). <i>"Ultimate" examples of favorite dishes.</i>	—	16
4. "How To Cook Everything" by Mark Bittman (MacMillan, \$25). <i>A fresh approach to the cooking encyclopedia, with more than 1,500 recipes.</i>	5	73	9. "The New Joy of Cooking" by Irma Rombauer, Marion Rombauer Becker and Ethan Becker (Scribner, \$30). <i>An update of the American cooking bible.</i>	6	30
5. "Essentials of Cooking" by James Peterson (Artisan, \$40). <i>A step-by-step manual in full color.</i>	4	9	10. "This Can't Be Tofu!" by Deborah Madison (Bantam Doubleday Dell, \$15). <i>America's favorite vegetarian cook may change your mind about soy.</i>	—	1

Rankings are based on a Times poll of national and independent cookbook sellers.

Peppers

Continued from H1

in it, then people are going to look at me and say, 'What are you doing?' I suppose I could just call it a marmalade or something like that."

Although ultra-mild jalapeños may be shunned by culinary artists, commercial salsa makers have used them for years to cut the heat in mass-produced salsas.

Plant breeder Phil Villa of Camarillo says he got a call from Texas salsa manufacturer Pace Foods in 1991, asking him to develop a heatless jalapeño. Four years later, after crossing a female Italian pepper with a male jalapeño chile, Villa fulfilled Pace's request, just as the company was being bought by Campbell Soup.

"So they began a process that I can't divulge to try to control the heat levels [in salsa]," Villa says. "Apparently it was more of a success than they expected."

But the heatless jalapeño relationship to

food processors goes back further, says Ben Villalon, a retired Texas A&M University plant breeder, who was cross-breeding the heat out of jalapeños in the 1970s.

"The first thing we were looking at 20 years ago tasted like grass," Villalon says. "The problem was trying to get the jalapeño flavor into that sweet jalapeño."

That problem was solved in 1978 when a low-heat jalapeño developed by Villalon, dubbed the TAM-1, was made available to the food industry by Texas A&M.

The TAM-1 rates 1,100 Scoville units. "The TAM-1 mild jalapeño had the [jalapeño] flavor, because it had a little heat in there," Villalon says.

"The problem with our mild jalapeños is you don't find them at the grocery stores and restaurants, because it's mainly a processing product that only goes to the big processors."

In 2001, however, Seminis Garden Inc. will introduce a no-heat jalapeño seed to the general public through retail seed catalogs, Seminis director Jim Waltrip says.

"There are a lot of people who can't eat any-

thing but mild salsa," Waltrip says. "You'll be able to put this in mild salsas and have sissies be able to eat it."

Chile breeder Bosland says he will mail NuMex Primavera seeds to whomever requests them.

"I've got a lot of mail from folks who said I've sold my soul to the devil. My desk was also piled high with people wanting a seed sample," Bosland says.

"A lot of people are terrified to even attempt jalapeño dishes because they don't want to get burned out. Now they can try them."

Whether heatless jalapeños will catch on at Mexican and Southwestern restaurants is questionable. There can be a stigma attached, says Chile Pepper magazine editor Robb Walsh.

"I remember a [Mexican] restaurant in New York where I ate a bunch of them," Walsh says. "I said, 'These must be TAM jalapeños.'

"They disavowed any knowledge because they were trying to say they were serving jalapeños and they didn't want it out that their jalapeños were actually heatless."