

# Trinidad Moruga Scorpion Wins Hottest Pepper Title

**AP** Associated Press

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There are super-hot chile varieties. And then there's the sweat-inducing, tear-generating, mouth-on-fire Trinidad Moruga Scorpion.

With a name like that, it's not surprising that months of research by the experts at New Mexico State University's Chile Pepper Institute have identified the variety as the new hottest pepper on the planet.

The golf ball-sized pepper scored the highest among a handful of chile breeds reputed to be among the hottest in the world. Its mean heat topped more than 1.2 million units on the Scoville heat scale, while fruits from some individual plants reached 2 million heat units.

"You take a bite. It doesn't seem so bad, and then it builds and it builds and it builds. So it is quite nasty," Paul Bosland, a renowned pepper expert and director of the chile institute, said of the pepper's heat.

Researchers were pushed by hot sauce makers, seed producers and others in the spicy foods industry to establish the average heat levels for super-hot varieties in an effort to quash unscientific claims of which peppers are actually the hottest.

That's something that hadn't been done before, Bosland said.

"The question was, could the Chile Pepper Institute establish the benchmark for chile heat?" he said. "Chile heat is a complex thing, and the industry doesn't like to base it on just a single fruit that's a record holder. It's too variable." The academic institute is based at the university's agriculture school and is partially funded by federal grants, as well as some industry groups depending on the project.



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The team planted about 125 plants of each variety — the Trinidad Moruga Scorpion, the Trinidad Scorpion, the 7-pot, the Chocolate 7-pot and the Bhut Jolokia, which was a previous record-holder identified by the institute and certified by Guinness World Records in 2007.

Randomly selected mature fruits from several plants within each variety were harvested, dried and ground to

powder. The compounds that produce heat sensation — the capsaicinoids — were then extracted and examined.

During harvesting, senior research specialist Danise Coon said she and the two students who were picking the peppers went through about four pairs of latex gloves.

"The capsaicin kept penetrating the latex and soaking into the skin on our hands. That has never happened to me before," she said.

Chile peppers of the same variety can vary in heat depending on environmental conditions. More stress on a plant — hotter temperatures or less water, for example — will result in hotter fruit.

The Trinidad Moruga Scorpion's new notoriety is already making waves in the industry and among those who love their hot, spicy foods.

"As with all the previous record holders, there will be a run on seeds and plants," said Jim Duffy, a grower in San Diego who supplied the university with seeds for four of the super-hot varieties. "Like Cabbage Patch dolls right before Christmas or Beanie Babies, it's like the hot item."

Not even Duffy or the researchers would dare to pop a whole Trinidad Moruga Scorpion in their mouths, but there are plenty of videos on social networking sites where heat-loving daredevils have tried.

The blood flow increases and the endorphins start flowing. Their faces turn red, the sweat starts rolling, their eyes and noses water and there's a fiery sensation that spreads across their tongues and down their throats.