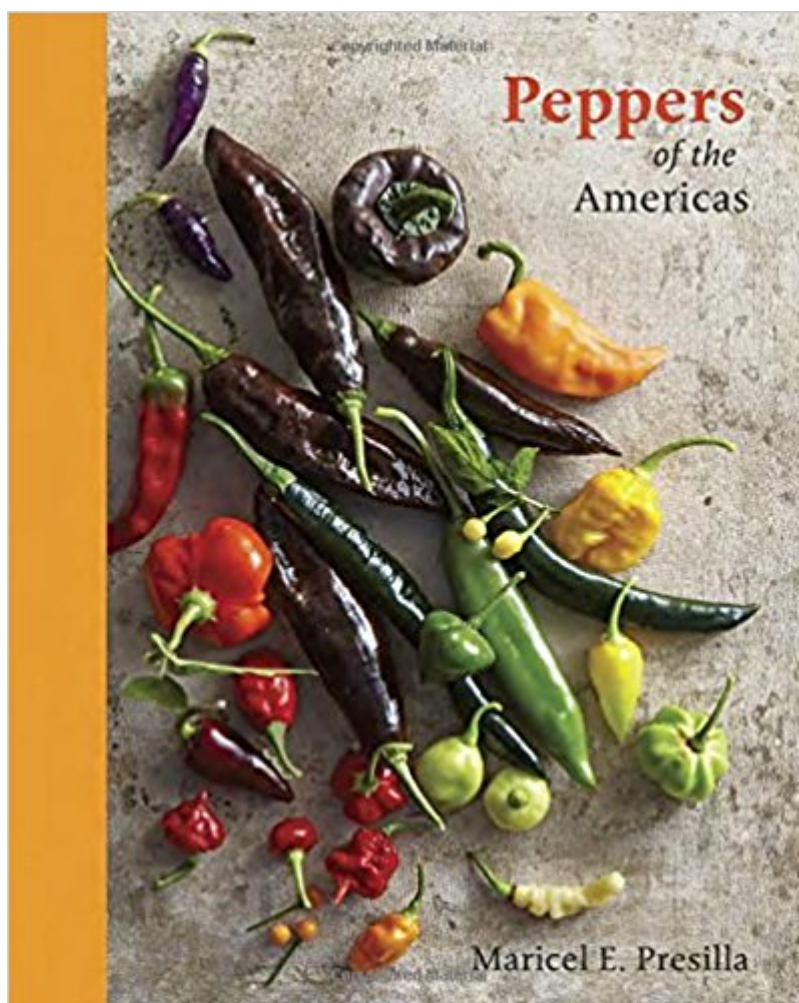


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# Peppers Of The Americas: The Remarkable Capsicums That Forever Changed Flavor



## Synopsis

A beautiful culinary and ethnobotanical survey of the punch-packing ingredient central to today's multi-cultural palate, with more than 40 pan-Latin recipes from a three-time James Beard Award-winning author and chef-restaurateur. From piquillos and shishitos to padrons and poblanos, the popularity of culinary peppers (and pepper-based condiments, such as Sriracha and the Korean condiment gochujang) continue to grow as more consumers try new varieties and discover the known health benefits of Capsicum, the genus to which all peppers belong. This stunning visual reference to peppers now seen on menus, in markets, and beyond, showcases nearly 200 varieties (with physical description, tasting notes, uses for cooks, and beautiful botanical portraits for each). Following the cook's gallery of varieties, more than 40 on-trend Latin recipes for spice blends, salsas, sauces, salads, vegetables, soups, and main dishes highlight the big flavors and taste-enhancing capabilities of peppers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Maricel is such an inspiring chef, and is so dedicated to understanding as much about the ingredients she uses as possible. This book is an amazing achievement and a resource that I will be using for years.”  
— JosÃ© AndrÃ©s, chef/owner, minibar by JosÃ© AndrÃ©s and ThinkFoodGroup  
“Maricel Presilla’s *Peppers of the Americas* is a deeply researched, eye-opening, beautiful guide to one of the world’s most intriguing foods.”  
— Harold McGee, author of *On Food and Cooking*

“Maricel Presilla is the planet’s foremost authority on the cuisines of Latin America” has written the most definitive guide to peppers ever created. It is an essential book for every cook who cares about flavor. —James Oseland, author of *Cradle of Flavor* and *Top Chef Masters* judge

“In this thorough work, Maricel Presilla brings her fine scholarship to an ingredient that virtually all Americans use, deftly traveling a great distance and wresting clarity from complexity. A truly impressive book. —Deborah Madison, author of *Vegetable Literacy* and *In My Kitchen*

“Presilla is both “botanical sleuth” and chef, presenting a scholarly and stunning visual guide to peppers in this definitive guide. —PW Starred Review

“Like Betty Fussell’s *The Story of Corn*, Presilla’s work is essential to our understanding of an ingredient that’s native to the Americas. It’s also absorbing and just plain fun: a hot summertime read for pepper people everywhere.” —*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

“There’s an astounding amount of information here—historical, botanical, and even linguistic. It almost accidentally functions as a crash course in food archaeology, and contains an explainer on the hot heat of capsaicin, the compound that makes food spicy. And somehow Presilla manages to present the vast majority of this potentially very dry subject matter almost conversationally, as though she is walking you through her backyard pepper pots, glass of wine in hand, telling you anecdotes about each. | The whole package is enough to make me reconsider single subject cookbooks. While I still think some can veer flabby, afterthoughts of publishers trying to plug up gaps in their catalog, *Peppers of the Americas* is different. Scholarly, even. And anything that manages to be well-researched and charming will always have a spot on my bookshelves—especially when it’s a book as spicy as this one.”

—Paula Forbes, *Food52* “You don’t expect a botanical ethnography on peppers to send shivers up your spine, but *Peppers of the Americas* does just that. With academic rigor, Presilla examines the *Capsicum* genus, pre-Hispanic origins, delving headlong into the epic collision between the Old and New World that sent peppers across the globe.” —*NBCNews.com*

MARICEL PRESILLA is the chef-owner of two pan-Latin restaurants (*Cucharama* and *Zafra*) and a cooking atelier (*Ultramarinos*), president/founder of *Gran Cacao Company* (a cacao importer), a frequent contributor to *Saveur*, and a former medieval Spanish history professor (Rutgers). She has been profiled in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, and led the White House’s Latin culture showcase in 2010. She was named the James Beard Best Chef Mid-Atlantic in 2012;

her opus, *Gran Cocina Latina: The Food of Latin America*, won the James Beard Book of the Year in 2013; and she was inducted into the Beard Foundation's Hall of Fame in 2015.

The author is a chef who grows peppers. Who cooks with peppers. Who loves peppers. And who has written a big, lovely, book about peppers. She starts with the early cultivation starting in South America. Then comes some botanical information about peppers. Next, Columbus arrives, and peppers spread around the world and become integral parts of many cuisines. Following this background comes an encyclopedic section, covering first fresh peppers and then dried peppers. While a great reference, you'll have to be really hard core to simply read it through. She then discusses growing peppers, although her experiences are based on the limited growing season in New Jersey. As a Southern Californian I can grow peppers as perennials, and have had plants last for years, sometimes even fruiting in the winter. She also covers buying fresh peppers, drying fresh peppers, and buying dried peppers. And, of course, cooking with peppers. Both general advice and also recipes, including sauces, condiments, and full up dishes. Oh, did I mention the book is full of wonderful color pictures? Mostly of peppers, of course! The author's love of peppers infuses the book. If you love peppers you'll want this book. I received a copy for review from the publisher, but ordered a copy of the final version for my library.

I got excited when I saw that Maricel Pressila had written a new book, as I was familiar with some of her previous works: Her *Gran Cocina Latina: The Food of Latin America* from 2012 is awesome and almost overwhelming in its magnitude. After reading it, I knew that Pressila was an author whose works I would always devour. Her books are some of the most detailed, involved, comprehensive and descriptive works you could possibly come across. Her books are meaty and jam-packed with invaluable and trustworthy information. Her writing is solid and thoughtful and personable. When I saw the topic of this new effort is peppers, I was thrilled, and I pre-ordered a copy knowing it was a book I needed in my personal library. In all my nuanced, provocative and improvised cooking--hot and spicy or savory fruity--I am, truly am, a pepper person. The topic of this book is very important to me, and I am very aware of it and peppers' influence on me and my style of cooking--has been that way for many, many decades and will be until the day I stop eating. I have to shout it to you: I have not been disappointed in Peppers of the Americas! Before I delved into the book, I first went looking for mention of my favorite and somewhat obscure pepper. It's not a hot one, and from my Caribbean background, I know it as aji dulce. And of course--as I trusted it

would be--it was right there listed in the index with three references and two recipes! And one of those two recipes is a variation on one I make when I am missing the Islands and willing to dip into my dwindling bag of aji dulce from the freezer. I thought: If this book has aji dulce in it, it is very comprehensive. I very seldom find it mentioned in Latin cookbooks. Presilla's descriptive words on dulce aji are right on. And there are pictures, too. I mention my personal favorite pepper and how I found it in this book for one reason: You have your personal favorite(s), too. And you will go looking for it/them in this book. And I'm pretty positive you will find them listed with recipes, with interesting information and descriptive words, with pictures. And, like me, after being assured that your favorites were not forgotten, you will read through the book and learn about all the others. It is a comprehensive book. It is a beautiful book. If you love your peppers hot or sweet chili head or pepper lover, cook or gardener, or a combo of all you will be happy with this book. It is a reference book and it is a cookbook. I know I will refer to it over and over again. It is beautiful enough to be considered a cocktail table book. It is not dull, nor is it dry: It is bursting with color and luscious and mouth-watering descriptions. The book delves into the history of peppers, beginning in prehistoric Bolivia and continuing through their travels throughout the world, and into research in the present. You will learn pepper anatomy, and learn about their heat. There are pictures of the fruit, the flower, and the seeds. You will learn something about how to identify the different members of the capsicum family. Photography and drawings are beautiful and varied. Pictures are clear and large enough to see details. You will find an excellent photo for each fresh and dried pepper, along with its history, description of the plant, its heat and flavor, and how best to use it. There is a chapter with helpful hints for growing peppers, and one for "cooking with peppers". Very helpful to me are the instructions for drying peppers and grinding into powders and roasting them, making pepper vinegars, fermenting hot peppers, and making other pepper condiments. (I especially liked the pepper-spiced pineapple vinegar, with vinegar made from fermenting strips of pineapple skin.) It may not seem like 40 recipes is a lot, but considering that Presilla provides a wealth of information regarding techniques I mention in the previous paragraph, potential is there for way more than forty recipes. As I read, creative thoughts were pounding and swirling around in my head! And when I counted, there were more than 50, with some recipes within recipes. There is a decent bibliography and a thorough index. There is an invaluable page of resources, too.

I recently mistook a habanero for one of those mini-bell peppers and popped it in my mouth. It

brought me to my knees. Obviously, I need to know more about peppers for my own safety. So, I was thrilled to see Ten Speed Press has a new book to save me and those like me from future disasters. *Peppers of the Americas* is a huge and beautiful book about those mighty flavor bombs that fall under the rubric of *frutales* "peppers." *frutales* Maricel Presilla has been dubbed the Queen of Capsicum and it seems to be a well-deserved title. The book is a deep dive into the peppers of the Americas. The introduction is full of the biology of the peppers, including a beautiful illustration of a pepper labeling all the pieces. There are lovely illustrations in the more scientific part of the book, showing how we can tell peppers apart by the calyx (where the stem attaches), the flower, and the seeds. There is a fascinating section on the archeological history of peppers, then its history of expansion and exploration carried around the world. Presilla talks about the five domesticated peppers and their essential traits and varieties. She grows her own and even explains how to grow peppers from seed. There are two huge galleries of peppers, regular and dried. Who knew there could be so many peppers and we have not even left the Americas. There is also an extensive collection of recipes, most of them from Latin America for everything from spice blends and vinegars to stews, casseroles, and so much more. The end of the book is full of resources where you can buy seeds, seedlings, and peppers to get started. The pictures by Romulo Yanes and the botanical illustrations by Julio J. Figueroa are beautiful. The book is one you will enjoy paging through looking at pictures and reading about the peppers. The information for each individual pepper describes their flavor and uses and then describes what they look like. *Peppers of the Americas* is a rich reference book for people who like to know more than how to use the foods they eat. There *frutales* is a bit of science, a bit of history, information on preserving and making condiments, as well as identification and cooking information. It does not tell us everything, though. When I decided to write about my habanero mishap, I wondered if it needed a tilde or not, and looked for an answer in the book. Alas, no joy. I discovered from Google that habanero is named for Havana, so there is no tilde, and my desire to add one is a hyperforeignism. I like the bits of folklore and tradition, like the *frutales* "birds-eye *frutales*," a bit of smashed pepper at the bottom of a bowl before serving soup to flavor all the soup. There are also several recipes for flavored vinegars, pastes, and salts you can make for flavorings. Many of the recipes are complex, though thankfully there are a few relatively easy ones as well. There are several delicious sounding recipes. They are discouraging for the home cook, though, because they are over-particularized. What I mean is that a recipe will call for a Kirby cucumber instead of a cucumber, *frutales* "Columbian panela, Mexican piloncillo, or light muscovado sugar *frutales* instead of sugar. When I read the recipe, I know I can make it with my ordinary ingredients, but it

comes across as though it's been posted with "Keep Out Home Cooks!" signs all over the place. To be honest, even at New Seasons, there is no wide selection of peppers, so the specificity is discouraging. How much worse will the recipe be with a pepper in the family, not that specific pepper? What about the sugars? Can I use a regular cucumber? These kinds of recipes create doubt and difference. I read them and feel as though the book was not written for me. I received a copy of *Peppers of the Americas* through Blogging for Books. It is published by Lorena Jones Books by Ten Speed Press.

If you are interested in peppers and grow numerous varieties like I do, then this book is a must read. Like the author, I live in N.J. and grow all my peppers in containers of varying sizes. I also dry peppers and pickle them for future use. Cooking with the peppers I grow is a must. Chef Presilla covers all these topics in this well illustrated and well written book. A welcome addition to any library devoted to food.

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