For Whom The Bell Tolls

*Sweet Bell Peppers*

1. **What are they?**
2. Come from the plant called *Capsicum annuum* and are part of the nightshade family of plants which also include potatoes, tomatoes and eggplant.
3. Botanically speaking, they are considered the fruit of this plant, but from a culinary standpoint it is a vegetable.
4. Sweet bell peppers have a distinct bell-shape with either 3 or 4 lobes. The number of lobes is just a different variety and has nothing to do with development.
5. They have a glossy exterior and are available in a variety of colors: green, yellow, orange, red, purple, brown, black and ivory.
6. They are related to “chili” or “hot” peppers
7. Hot peppers contain a substance called capsaicin which gives them their trademark “heat.”
8. Sweet bell peppers do not carry the capsaicin gene and therefore do not have that spicy flavor.
9. All bell peppers start off green and change color as they ripen.
10. There are some varieties of bell peppers that remain green when they are fully ripe. The green peppers found in the grocery store are most likely this type because they could charge more for the red, yellow and orange varieties.
11. As they ripen their sugars become more fully developed making them sweeter. That’s why a red pepper is sweeter than a yellow or green pepper.
12. The red, orange and yellow peppers cost more because they take longer to develop and there is more opportunity for crop loss.
13. **History of Sweet Bells**
14. Sweet Bell peppers are thought to have originated in South and Central America about 5000 BC where they were a mainstay in the diets of native peoples.
15. The original name for this food in Spanish was *pimiento.* The misleading name “pepper” was credited to Christopher Columbus who was in search of the prized peppercorn plant.
16. When the seeds were brought back to Europe they quickly were incorporated into the cuisine. Their adaptability to varying climates helped spread their use even faster.
17. Nutrition & Health Benefits
18. Bell peppers are high in vitamin C. The longer a pepper is allowed to ripen the more vitamin C it has. Half cup of green pepper has twice the vitamin C as an orange. Red peppers have four times the amount.
19. Vitamin C is a powerful antioxidant. Antioxidants help the body to get rid of or neutralize harmful substances called free radicals.
20. Free radicals are naturally occurring & normal and are responsible for damaging cells and causing all sorts of diseases.
21. Heat does destroy vitamin C so anytime you can eat raw sweet peppers you can get a good dose.
22. Bell peppers are high in vitamin A and its various forms like beta-carotene, lycopene, lutein, zeaxanthin.
23. These forms of vitamin A are also excellent antioxidants.
24. Vitamin A is not destroyed by heat and it is better absorbed when cooked.
25. Vitamin A is fat soluble, again, another reason not to cut out fat entirely!
26. The yellow, red and orange varieties of sweet peppers have more vitamin A than the green ones. Red ones have about 9 times more!
27. Bell peppers are a good source of fiber, both soluble and insoluble.
28. The skin of the pepper would be the insoluble fiber which is important for good colon health and is also called “roughage”.
29. The fleshy part just under the skin would contain the soluble fiber and that is important for vascular health.
30. Bell peppers also contain several B vitamins which are important for maintaining good nerve and vascular health. One medium pepper has about 15% of daily requirement for B6. It also contains about 5% of the daily needs for thiamin, niacin, and folate all of which are B vitamins.
31. Bell Peppers are also high in vitamin K. This is typically not a problem for those who take blood thinners because most people use peppers as an ingredient and not as the main food.
32. As mentioned before, bell peppers DO NOT contain any significant amounts of capsaicin, the substance responsible for giving other peppers their “heat”. For this reason, bell peppers do not have the health benefits associated with this substance. These include the release of the “pain-killer” hormones called endorphins.

1. **Fun Facts**
2. Paprika is made from sweet red bell peppers or cayenne peppers.
3. Green peppers stay freshest the longest.
4. China is the largest producer of bell peppers. Mexico is the second largest followed by the U.S.
5. California and Florida are the largest bell-pepper producing states. (However, if we are talking about chili peppers, New Mexico is in first place!)
6. The average U.S. adult consumes almost 10# of bell peppers per year.
7. If peppers cause gas or burping, try removing the skin. The easiest way to do this is by roasting first.
8. The pulpy white insides are rich in flavonoids, another antioxidant.
9. The brown bell pepper is often called the Chocolate Bell and it is sweeter than the green pepper. Some even claim it is the sweetest of the bells but that might have something to do with the name and what a person would expect! They do NOT have a chocolatey flavor.
10. The Blushing Beauty hybrid is an exception to the rule…it is never green but rather starts out ivory and then blushes to light-red, orange-red and finally scarlet red.
11. **Storage, Preparation and Cooking**
12. When purchasing peppers, look for firm, thick walls, glossy skin and firm stem. If they are turning colors, that is okay, as long as the colors are normal for that pepper. Black and brown spots on a red pepper would not be considered normal!
13. Wash peppers in cold water just before using them.
14. Store the unwashed peppers in vegetable compartment of the refrigerator for 7-10 days. Because they are sensitive to moisture loss, it is best to include a damp cloth in the compartment to help the peppers retain their moisture and prevent shrinkage. Do not remove the stem until using.
15. If you are going to eat within a day or two and you suspect they are not fully ripe, you can store them at room temperature.
16. Some store bought peppers have been waxed, so gently scrub if that is the case.
17. Bell peppers can be frozen without blanching. It’s best to keep them as whole as possible to reduce the exposed surface area to the air which helps retain nutrients and flavor.
18. Peppers can be prepared using a variety of techniques. Keep in mind that cooking peppers decreases the vitamin C but increases the amount of usable vitamin A.
19. Roasting peppers is good if you want to remove the skin since the flesh can then be scraped from it.
20. Add peppers to soup, stews, salads, side dishes.
21. Peppers go well with beef, pork, chicken, sausage and other meat dishes.

1. **Demonstration & Activities**
2. Cut up and have people sample the different colors of peppers to compare sweetness, tenderness and other characteristics.
3. Probably can’t get the more unusual peppers but you can still show quality pictures of these.
4. Sample peppers in a variety of dishes. Show a roasted pepper and how to scrape it from the skin. (Point out that people who avoid peppers because of gas/burps, often find that removing the skin will prevent this.)