

Pepper, Pimiento—*Capsicum annuum* L.¹

James M. Stephens²

Pimiento, also pimento, is a type of pepper somewhat similar to the bell pepper. Instead of blocky, the fruit (pod) is smooth, conical, or heart-shaped, up to 3- to 4-inches-long and 2- to 2½-inches-wide at the shoulder. The flesh is very thick, sweet and red to reddish yellow at maturity.

Culture

In Florida, pimientos are grown only to a limited extent commercially. Likewise, the bell type is much preferred by home gardeners. Georgia has been one of the leading states both in the production and processing of pimientos.

For home gardens, pimientos should be grown in a manner similar to that for bell peppers. They may be seeded directly in the garden, or seeded into a seedbed or appropriate container for transplant production. A pimiento seedling is ready for transplanting when 6-10 inches high. It may be set bare-rooted or in an individual transplant container such as a peat pot. Allow a bit wider spacing for pimientos than for bell pepper. Set plants 24-30 inches apart in a 36-48 inch wide row.

The main variety used in the South is 'Perfection,' or improvements such as 'Truhart Perfection.' 'Perfection' becomes red ripe about 80 days after seeding. Fruits are 3½ inches long, 3 to 3¼ inches in diameter, and heart- or top-shaped.



Figure 1. Pimiento peppers.
Credits: Blue Goose, Inc.

Use

Pimiento is the main type of pepper used for canning. The outside peel, the seeds, and the tissue around the seeds are first removed, so that only the interior part of the fleshy walls is used. Though pimientos are good sources of vitamins A and C, they are used chiefly for color and flavor in salads, meat products, vegetable dishes, and sandwich spreads with perhaps the most going into pimiento cheese. Large amounts are used for stuffing olives and for coloring salad dressing.

In the processing of pimientos, the tough skin must be removed. The old Spanish way (it is native to tropical America but was made popular in Spain) was to suspend the pods on sticks and pass them through a fire. The skins were charred by burning, then removed with a rough cloth. Today, while many improvements have been made, the same principle of roasting is still used by some commercial companies.

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