



PLANT FACT SHEET

Capsicum frutescens L.

GENUS *Capsicum* **FAMILY** Solanaceae

COMMON NAMES Bird's eye chillies

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Fruit, Herb, Spice, Vegetable

The leaves are eaten cooked. The fruit can be used in very small quantities to spice food.

The small red fruit are very hot to eat due to a chemical called capsaicin. They are therefore used to add spice and flavour to other foods.

They are used to make many foods and sauces hot and spicy. They can also be dried and stored.

DESCRIPTION

It is a shrubby perennial plant about 1 m tall. The leaves are smaller than round capsicums or bell peppers. Two or more flowers occur together in the axils of leaves. They have small pointed fruit about 1-2 cm long and they are red when ripe. They have a very hot taste when eaten or touched on the lips.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. A native of tropical America. The plants grow from sea level up to about 1800 m altitude in the equatorial tropics. They can't stand water-logging or frost. They are tolerant to high temperatures and a wide range of rainfall. Very high rainfall leads to poor fruit set and rotting of fruit. Soil needs to be well drained and preferably fertile with adequate organic material. Light loamy soils rich in lime are best. It does not do well on atolls. It suits hardiness zones 10-12.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

The seeds are dried in the sun. They are small. For large scale plantings, 1.8-2.3 kg per ha of seed are needed. Seed is best sown in nurseries and the seedlings transplanted when they have 4-5 leaves. (After 3-4 weeks). They can be transplanted at about 0.8 m spacing. Pruning out the tops can increase branching. This is often done 10 days before transplanting. Excessive nitrogen can reduce fruit setting.

Harvesting and Seed Production

The first picking of fruit can occur 3 months after planting and continue about every two weeks. Plants continue to be harvested for about 4-5 years before replanting. For dried chillies, the fruit are dried in the sun for 3-15 days. The fresh weight is reduced by about two thirds during drying. Yields of dry chillies can be from 300 kg to 2500 kg per hectare depending on growing conditions, irrigation etc. Young leaves are picked.

NOTES

There are 10 *Capsicum* species.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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