

ROBB WALSH

THE HOT SAUCE COOKBOOK

Turn Up the Heat with 60+ Pepper Sauce Recipes



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Photography by Todd Coleman



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INTRODUCTION

Chile peppers are totemic in many cultures—that now includes our own. In 1992, when sales of salsa surpassed ketchup, newspaper columnists, sociologists, and grocery industry gurus marked it as a major milestone, an indicator of irreversible changes in the ethnic makeup of our society. By 2002, the space allotted to hot sauces and salsas in the average supermarket went from a few feet of shelf space to close to an entire aisle. At the fast-food counter and the condiment station of the ballpark, hot sauce has joined ketchup and mustard in the plastic-squeeze-packet pantheon.

Business Week's list of the twenty-five top-selling condiments in America includes six salsas and four pepper sauces. The hot parade shows no sign of letting up. The 2012 Culinary Trend Mapping Report by food-industry think tank Packaged Facts declared that hot and spicy foods were still one of the fastest growing segments of the grocery business. The researchers reported that multicultural Generation Y and the growing Asian demographic were "eager to try bigger, bolder, hot and spicy flavors in nearly every daypart, food and beverage category, and season."

From the mainstream American point of view, hot and spicy food seems like something that's arrived on the culinary scene in the last twenty years. But while some of the brand names might be new, the recipes for the hot sauces contained inside the bottles go back hundreds and, sometimes even thousands, of years.

This book is a casual tour of hot-sauce history, a practical guide for making it at home, and an exploration of the strange relationship between humankind and hot and spicy food.

In six chapters, we consider where hot sauce came from and where it's going. [Chapter 1](#) introduces some key hot sauce terminology and also describes the various peppers that are used in recipes throughout this book. In [chapter 2](#), you'll see how your favorite Mexican salsa recipes evolved from centuries-old Mesoamerican "chilmoles." [Chapter 3](#) will give you some new ideas about how to use the habanero-type chiles of the Caribbean islands, and recounts the story of the pepper sauces that made those intensely hot chiles famous. [Chapter 4](#) follows the fortunes of the Louisiana pepper sauce moguls, and offers recipes for making your own fermented pepper sauces at home. [Chapter 5](#) is a world tour of international hot sauces, including do-it-yourself recipes for Thai Sriracha, Ethiopian berbere, and Indonesian sambal oelek. Finally, in [chapter 6](#) we'll see how some of America's top chefs are using hot sauces to raise the profile of fiery food in contemporary American cuisine.



HURTS SO GOOD

Like coffee, tea, and marijuana, chile peppers are considered to be psychotropics. When you bite into a chile pepper, or eat a little hot sauce, the chemical capsaicin stimulates the salivary glands and the sweat glands and causes the brain to release endorphins, the natural painkillers that are stronger than morphine. Was it the mind-altering qualities of chile peppers that made them attractive to our cave-dwelling ancestors, or was it the zip they added to a boring diet? Or was it a little of both?

Whatever caused early man to love them, the chile pepper acquired mystical significance. The pods were used as currency in ancient Peru and appear in Incan stone carvings. In pre-Colombian Mesoamerica, peppers were prescribed for coughs, sore throats, and infections. The Spanish missionaries tried to ban them because they thought that chile peppers induced lust.

While English sailors were called “limeys” because they took citrus fruit juice to prevent scurvy, their counterparts on Spanish ships ate chile peppers for the same reason. Ounce for ounce, green chiles have twice as much vitamin C as oranges. They are also rich in vitamins A, C, and E, and packed with iron, magnesium, niacin, riboflavin, thiamin, and potassium. Capsaicin, which can be extracted from chiles, is also used to treat chronic pain.

The health-giving and flavorful ingredient was turned into all kinds of sauces and condiments. In those parts of the world where chile peppers grow year-round, it was the flavor and convenience of those sauces that made them appealing. But in parts of the world like North America, where the peppers are harvested in the late summer and hard to find for the rest of the year, making hot sauce was one of several methods of preservation.

Most North American chile peppers are descendants of the tiny chile pequín. Some ten thousand years ago, the wild chile spread to all of Central America, most of Mexico, and the tip of South Texas. The chile pequín was a tolerated weed, and its human cultivation was due more to benign neglect than active nurture. Its Latin name, *Capsicum annuum* var. *aviculare* says a lot about it. In Latin, *annuum* means “annual,” and *aviculare* refers to birds. Like most of the wild peppers, chile pequín advertises itself to passing birds by growing erect from its stem and turning a bright shade of red when it is ripe. The digestive tract of the bird softens the seeds of the chile, and the excretion provides a rich fertilizer. And since birds usually defecate while perched on the branch of a tree, the seeds are planted in the shade where pepper plants prefer to grow.

Early human preference for one wild chile strain over another encouraged mutations that produced fatter chiles, or ones that grew larger by virtue of hanging pods rather than an upright ones since these were better hidden from the birds. And these mutations evolved into the many cultivars we eat today. The cultivars got local names that were different from place to place.

In the 1980s, the rise of Southwestern cuisine in the United States set off an explosion of interest in indigenous ingredients and chile peppers in particular. American chefs, gardeners, home cooks, food manufacturers, and cookbook writers clamored for reliable reference materials. But scientists had despaired of keeping the many strains of peppers straight.

“The tremendous variation in fruit size, shape, and color ... make it impossible to devise a practical system of classification that would cover the large numbers of forms known to be cultivated,” wrote chile pepper authority Paul G. Smith, professor emeritus of the University of California in 1987.

But while a scientific guide to chiles might have been out of the question, a practical guide was still sorely needed. In the late 1970s, Dr. Paul Bosland of New Mexico State University was one of the first to start organizing chile pepper nomenclature for nonscientists. An Albuquerque writer named Dave DeWitt documented Bosland’s efforts and founded Chile Pepper magazine in 1987.

In the early 1980s, Dr. Jean Andrews also began working on her book *Peppers, the Domesticated Capsicums*, in Austin, Texas. (*Capsicum* is the name of the biological genus that chile peppers are a part of. There are twenty-something species in the genus *Capsicum*, five of which are domesticated.) Though Andrews was an avid gardener and lover of hot and spicy food, her doctorate wasn’t in horticulture or plant genetics, it was in art history. For her book, she grew chile peppers from seeds and then painted elegant watercolor illustrations of the plants, the flowers, and the pepper pods.

Early on Andrews enlisted Texas greenhouse owners and horticulturalists to assist in the challenge of growing some of the more difficult peppers. *Peppers, the Domesticated Capsicums* remains the definitive work for laypeople on chile pepper history and ethnobotany. It also includes some great recipes. While there are only fifteen pepper paintings, they include all five of the domesticated species. The efforts of Jean Andrews continued to reverberate long after the book was published in 1984. When I first met Andrews in the late 1980s, she took me to the Penn Brothers Sunset Farm just outside of Austin on Lake Travis. There, thanks to the encouragement of Jean Andrews, Robert Penn was successfully growing all five domesticated species of the *Capsicum* family.

The five domesticated species are *Capsicum frutescens* and *Capsicum chinense*, the peppers common to the Caribbean; *Capsicum baccatum* from central South America; *Capsicum pubescens*, which grows in the Andes Mountains; and the *Capsicum annuum* of North America. With the exceptions of the Tabasco pepper and the habanero, nearly every other pepper we eat in North America and Europe, including bell peppers, Anaheims, jalapeños, and serranos, as well as poblanos, guajillos, and cascabels, comes from the *Capsicum annuum* species.

The word chile comes from the prefix *chil* in the Nahuatl language and was the name adopted by the Spanish to describe the peppers of Mexico and Central America. *Chilmole* was the Nahuatl name for chile sauces, *chilpotle* (which Andrews always insisted was the correct spelling) was the name given to smoked jalapeño peppers. *Chiltepin*, which means “flea chile,” was the name for tiny pepper we call the pequín chile. *Aji* is the word for a chile pepper in most of South America.

I have witnessed a great many emotional confrontations over the names of chile peppers in my career. In some cases, it’s a matter of pride. Jamaicans get irate if you call a Scotch bonnet a habanero, no matter how close in flavor and size the two may be. Residents of Mexico City become furious over the name jalapeño, which would seem to imply that their favorite chile originated among the residents of rural Jalapa. Instead, *cuahresmeño* is the preferred term in Mexico City. And the beloved long red chile of Hatch and Chimayo, New Mexico, becomes just another guajillo when you cross the border into Mexico.

Chile pepper nomenclature became somewhat standardized in the cookbook world with the publication of several guidebooks. In 1990, DeWitt

published The Whole Chile Pepper Book with an extensive chile pepper glossary and photo guide. Mark Miller published another authoritative photographic guide to peppers titled The Great Chile Book in 1991. That was followed by the Great Chile Posters, by Miller, one for green chiles and one for dried chile peppers. The effort to standardize chile pepper names culminated in 1992, when Dr. Bosland founded The Chile Pepper Institute at New Mexico State University, which is now recognized as the center of chile pepper identification, horticulture, and agricultural studies in the United States.

But the names used for specific chiles still vary from region to region in Latin America and, in some cases, we have imported the confusion to the United States. Exactly what an ancho or a pasilla looks like is a complicated subject. The big green poblano chile and its dried form, the ancho, are accepted names in Central Mexico and the central part of the United States. But the same pepper is confusingly called a pasilla or ancho in both the fresh and dried form on the Pacific Coast of Mexico.

Many Mexican-Americans in Southern California come from the Pacific states of Mexico, hence their nomenclature is used in Los Angeles. And since grocers on the Eastern Seaboard buy their chiles from the Los Angeles Union Terminal Market, food stores in LA, New York, Boston, and Washington DC often use the Oaxacan nomenclature for chile peppers rather than the Central Mexican names. This makes it very difficult to write cookbooks that everyone can use.

In 1999, after I inherited the job of editor-in-chief of Chile Pepper magazine from Dave DeWitt, I took a trip to the LA produce terminal. With the various guidebooks and posters in hand and accompanied by executives from Melinda’s Produce Company, I attempted to negotiate an agreement on nomenclature with the chile pepper importers. The effort was a lesson in humility. I learned that if your grandmother called it a pasilla, nobody is going to convince you it should really be called a poblano.

FRESH CHILES (listed from mild to hot)

What follows is a short reference guide to a few common chile peppers, mainly the ones called for in the recipes in this book. A photo identification guide appears [here](#) and [here](#).

Anaheim Chile or Long Green Chile

This chile was hybridized in the early 1900s to provide New Mexicans with a mild version of their native chile that could be eaten as a vegetable. It has a pleasant flavor and ranges from slightly warm to medium-hot. Anaheims are generally roasted and peeled before they are used. The name comes from a chile cannery opened in Anaheim, California, in 1900 by a farmer named Emilio Ortega, who brought the pepper seeds to California from New Mexico.

In New Mexico, the long green chile is further subdivided by region of origin. The two most common names encountered are Hatch and Chimayó. Hatch chiles are grown in the southern part of New Mexico (around the town of Hatch) from certified seed sources and are graded according to heat.

Chimayó chiles are the older, more traditional chiles grown in the northern part of the state (around the town of Chimayó) from seeds that have been saved from the last harvest. Chimayó chiles are treasured for their superior flavor and unpredictable heat, but they are becoming increasingly rare. The Santa Fe Farmers’ Market is one of the only reliable places to buy them.

Poblano Chile

Fatter and wider than the Anaheim, the poblano is a darker green and has a richer flavor. It is one of the most commonly used chiles in Central Mexican cooking, both in its fresh and dried forms (see “[Ancho Chile](#)”). Poblanos are named after the Mexican city of Puebla. They are generally slightly hot and are usually roasted and peeled before use. While some people use the term “ancho” to refer to a fresh poblano, in this book, “ancho” refers only to its dried form. Roasted and peeled poblanos are often cut into half-inch strips, which are called *rajas*.

Padrón Pepper

These small to medium-size peppers are served fried in olive oil and lightly salted as a bar snack in the Spanish region of Galicia. They are increasingly popular in the United States. There is a popular rhyme that explains their heat level: “Los pimientos de Padrón, unos pican y outros non,” which translates “Peppers of Padron, some of them hot, and others not.” You can substitute the similar-looking Fresno peppers if you can’t find the Spanish variety.

Jalapeño Chile

Hot, green, and bullet-shaped, the jalapeño is the classic American hot pepper and one of the world’s best-known chiles. The Spanish named this chile after Jalapa (or Xalapa), a town in the state of Veracruz where it is grown. But the name is unpopular in Mexico due to the fact that the pepper is also grown in many other places. It is also known as a cueresmeño, huachinango, or chile gordo in Mexico. The fresh jalapeño has a strong, vegetal flavor to go with the heat. The jalapeño is most widely consumed in its pickled form.

Serrano Chile

The Spanish found this pepper in the mountains of Puebla and Hidalgo, so they named it serrano, referring to the Sierra mountains where it grew. Similar to the jalapeño, the serrano is hotter and smaller. Most Mexicans claim that serranos have a fuller, more herbaceous flavor. Since the vast majority of jalapeños are pickled, the serrano is actually the most widely used fresh chile pepper in Mexican hot sauces.

Chile Pequin

Also known as piquin, chilipiquin, or chiltepin, this tiny chile grows wild throughout southern Texas and northern Mexico. Although “pequin” seems to be a corruption of the Spanish *pequeño*, meaning “small,” the Spanish name itself is probably a corruption of chiltecpin, a Nahuatl word meaning “flea chile,” a reference to both its size and sting. In northern Mexico, they are collected in the wild and sold in markets, where they fetch more than almost any other kind of chile. They are sometimes dried and preserved for year-round use. A pequin bush can often be found growing wild in backyards and vacant lots across the southern United States. Because they are not grown commercially, they are seldom found in

restaurant cooking or in grocery stores. They are available in Mexican markets, however.



[Padrón](#), [Thai](#), [Pequin](#), [Poblano](#), [Serrano](#), [Jalapeño](#), [Habanero](#), [Anaheim](#)

Thai Chile (prik ki nu)

Tiny, skinny, pointed Thai peppers are the most common chile grown in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore; they are also popular in India. They are very hot and used in large quantities in the spicy cuisines of Southeast Asia. Thai chiles are also sold dried.

Habanero-Type Chiles

The habanero came to Mexico from the Caribbean and is named after Havana, Cuba. “Habanero” means “someone from Havana” (no tilde over the “n” please). The habanero is part of the *Capsicum chinense* species, which has a bewildering number of land forms and pod shapes, all known by different names. The Jamaican Scotch bonnet is a close cousin and so is the bullnose pepper of Trinidad and many others. Horticulturalists and the USDA often lump them all together under the term “habanero-type peppers” and, for the sake of simplicity, we will use that term in this book. The habanero-type pepper is known for its wonderful apricot-like flavor and aroma, but must be used in small quantities and handled with care due to its intense heat (see box on [safe handling instructions](#)).

DRIED CHILES

The dried chile peppers in this book are shown [here](#), and listed below from mildest to hottest.

Ancho Chile

The dried form of the poblano chile, the ancho is very dark brown and wide (the word ancho means “wide” in Spanish). Anchos are the fleshiest of the dried chiles, and their pulp combines a little bitter flavor with a sweetness reminiscent of raisins. They are usually mild, although occasionally one will surprise you with its heat. Mulattos are closely related and a suitable substitute.

Guajillo Chile

Tapered with a smooth, shiny, reddish skin, the Mexican guajillo has a tart, medium-hot flavor. When soaked and puréed, it gives foods an orange color. Dried New Mexican long red chiles are also called guajillos in Mexican markets. Don’t make the mistake of substituting South American guajillos; the pulp from these is bright red when reconstituted, but the chiles have no heat.

Cascabel Chile

The “rattle chile” got its name because of the sound the loose seeds inside the dry mirasol chile make. The cascabel is typically round, but small bullet-shaped dried chiles are also common. The reconstituted chile is reddish in color, nutty in flavor, and medium-hot; it makes an excellent salsa.

Pasilla Chile

Long and skinny with a black, slightly wrinkled skin, the pasilla has a strong, slightly bitter but satisfying flavor and can range from medium-hot to hot. The name comes from the Spanish *pasa*, meaning “raisin,” a reference to the appearance of the skin. Some people use the term “pasilla” to refer to dried poblano chiles; however, in this book, “pasilla” refers to a dried chilaca pepper.

Aleppo Pepper

Named after the largest city in Syria, these medium-hot peppers are very popular in Mediterranean cooking. Dried Aleppo peppers come whole, in crushed flakes, or as a powder. Fruity, sweet, and oily, crushed Aleppo peppers are a favorite for pizza or pasta dishes.



[Pequín](#), [Chipotle](#), [Pasilla](#), [Aleppo](#), [Chile de Árbol](#), [Guajillo](#), [Ancho](#), [Cascabel](#)

Chipotle Chile

This is the smoke-dried jalapeño. Small, wrinkled, and light brown, chipotles have an incredibly rich, smoky flavor and are usually very hot. Smoking jalapeños to preserve them has been common in Mexico since long before the Spanish arrived.

I prefer to use dry chipotles, but you can also buy them canned, and canned chipotles are acceptable in most recipes. Obviously, you can't make chile powder from canned chipotles, but you can use them for purées. Canned chipotles are already soaked in some kind of sauce, usually a vinegary adobo. Just stem and seed them and purée them with some of the sauce from the can.

Chile de Árbol

Literally “tree chile,” the chile de árbol is a small, red, shiny chile about 3 inches long with a thin tapering body. It has a high heat level and is often chopped and simmered with other ingredients to make a hot table sauce. Fresh chiles de árbol look very similar to cayenne peppers.

THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE HOT SAUCE FESTIVAL

In the summer of 1990, the Travis County Farmers' Market in Austin, Texas, sponsored a vegetable gardening competition. The "county agent," as the agricultural extension service representative was known, was the usual judge for such events. But while the Travis County agent was ready to judge the flavors of peaches and watermelons, he wasn't willing to munch on hot peppers.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Penn Brothers and other pepper growers made the Travis County Farmers' Market famous for the amazing variety of chiles. Chefs bought most of the peppers the farm produced. Jean Andrews and serious chile lovers in Austin gathered at the market on Saturday mornings to check out the peppers and buy pepper seedlings.

Peppers were such a big draw, that Hill Rylander, who ran the farmers' market at the time, wanted to include them in the competition. So he called me and asked me to be the chile judge. Rylander knew I would accept the invitation because I had been writing about chile peppers in the Austin Chronicle for some time. After the chile pepper judging event was over, I told Hill Rylander that since few people actually ate raw peppers, it might make more sense to judge the peppers in a hot sauce. He loved the idea of a hot sauce competition and offered to host it the next year.

Such a contest wouldn't have made any sense if hot sauce and chile peppers weren't so ubiquitous in Austin, Texas, at the time. A bag of chips and a bottle of hot sauce seemed to be on every table in every home in the city. The chips and salsa phenomenon first blossomed in Tex-Mex restaurants in the 1970s. In the 1950s and 1960s, before tortilla chips were common, Tex-Mex restaurant patrons ate their hot sauce with buttered saltines or Fritos corn chips.

Tortilla chips have been manufactured in Southern California since the 1940s. Doritos, the first national brand of tortilla chips, originated in Disneyland in Anaheim. Frito-Lay bought the brand and introduced it nationally in 1966. There were already lots of bottled salsas on the market at that time, including Pace Picante Sauce and the La Victoria line of sauces. But salsas weren't really thought of as dips; they were used for huevos rancheros and other cooked dishes.

Totopos, tostadas, and chile sauces have existed in Mesoamerica since pre-Colombian times. But using salsa as a dip for a basket of chips is uniquely Mexican-American. It is modeled on the American “chips and dip” cocktail-hour snack craze of the 1950s. The fad was so popular that two-bowl sets for serving potato chips with a dip were made in patterns to match existing dinnerware and glassware. In the 1970s, the potato chips were occasionally replaced with Doritos and the onion dip with Mexican salsa in Southern California. The combination was especially popular in Texas as the margarita replaced the martini as the cocktail of choice.

Cocktails were illegal in Texas restaurants until the 1970s. When the law was changed to allow cities and counties to vote on whether restaurants could serve cocktails, the margarita suddenly became ubiquitous in “wet” counties. Mexican-American restaurants started putting a bowl of hot sauce and a basket of tortilla chips on bar tops and tables to stimulate demand for the profitable cocktails. The combination would go on to become a national obsession.

When the Southwestern cuisine movement came along in the 1980s, food lovers started calling their hot sauce “salsa,” and chefs started taking it seriously. Exotic interior Mexican salsas made with all kinds of different chiles began to appear. Chile lovers started bringing souvenir bottles of pepper sauces home from all over the world.

Superhot Chiles and Hot Sauces

The relative heat of chile peppers was once judged by a measurement called the Scoville Organoleptic Heat Scale. Human subjects tasted diluted pepper solutions to detect heat. A bell pepper is zero on this scale, a jalapeño around 8,000 units, a cayenne around 50,000 and a habanero around 200,000. The number is determined by how much the solution has to be diluted before the heat is undetectable. Today chile pepper heat is tested by high-performance liquid chromatography, but we still use the Scoville terminology.

Police pepper spray tests between 1.5 and 2 million Scoville units. The Trinidad Moruga Scorpion pepper is currently the world’s hottest; it is roughly the same heat as pepper spray at around 2 million Scoville units. It deposed the Naga Viper chile and the Bhut Jolokia pepper, which are both closer to a mere million Scoville units. There are lots of other extremely hot chiles in the record books and making pepper sauces with these chiles is a popular commercial pursuit. Pulling out a bottle of Bhut Jolokia (also known as Ghost Pepper) sauce can quickly turn a cocktail party into a fire-eating contest.

Accepting a dare to eat some really hot sauce is not a very good idea. Several manufacturers sell novelty hot sauces that contain commercial capsaicin or other chemical compounds. These hot sauces aren’t intended to season food; they are sold as practical jokes. Some of them have been banned from hot and spicy food shows because they have made people sick.

The competition to make the world’s hottest hot sauce and grow the world’s hottest peppers has turned into something of a circus. While it’s interesting, it isn’t about making delicious spicy food. The heat level of regular supermarket habanero-type peppers at 200,000 Scoville units is plenty hot enough for my kitchen. If you want to cook with pepper spray, knock yourself out.

Caution: Handling Chile Peppers

It’s wise to wear rubber gloves when handling jalapeños, serranos, and especially habanero-type chiles. Get a little juice from the cut-up pepper on your face or in your eyes, and you can count on 10 minutes of sheer agony. If you don’t have rubber gloves, use a piece of plastic wrap to hold the pepper while you cut it. Clean the knife and the cutting board immediately with hot soapy water. If you get pepper juice on your hands, try soaking them for a few minutes in a mild bleach solution.

Intrigued by the culinary trend and Austin’s position in its forefront, I wrote an article in Chile Pepper magazine calling Austin “the hot sauce capital of the world.” Predictably, salsa lovers in other cities disagreed. The San Antonio Current, a weekly newspaper in the Alamo City challenged the Austin Chronicle to a contest—San Antonio hot sauces versus Austin hot sauces—judged blind by top chefs.

The first “Austin Chronicle Hot Sauce Contest” as the event was originally known, was held at the Travis County Farmers’ Market in 1991. It was held outdoors on a Sunday afternoon in late August—the peak of the chile pepper growing season and the hottest part of the summer. The Austin Chronicle enlisted a few musicians to come and play and hired a caterer to supply some beer. There have been lots of changes in the intervening years—the San Antonio versus Austin format was scrapped, and the contest was opened to people from anywhere in the world.

TAKING HOT SAUCE SERIOUSLY

The Austin Chronicle Hot Sauce Festival was hardly the first hot and spicy food contest. In fact, it was started in the heyday of the chili cook-offs. These events were often characterized by flatulence jokes and a generally drunken and debauched atmosphere, so it seemed that the time was ripe for a serious culinary competition for hot and spicy food.

Over the years, the judging panels at the Austin Chronicle Hot Sauce Festival have been staffed by a “who’s who” of chefs. The list includes Stephan Pyles, Bruce Auden, Alan Lazarus, David Garrido, Tyson Cole, Miguel Ravago, Chris Shepherd, and Randy Clemens to name a few. The judging criteria included appearance, aroma, balance of heat, flavor, and overall impression, with a heavy weighting toward flavor. Several winners have gone on to start successful salsa concerns.

Attendees line up to sample hot sauce to their heart’s content. When 10,000 people showed up at the Travis County Farmers’ Market in the fifth year of the festival, traffic came to a halt in north central Austin, and the event was forced to relocate. In its seventh year, the Austin Chronicle Hot Sauce Festival moved to a clearing in the woods of Waterloo Park, where it flourished for fourteen years. In its twenty-second year, the festival moved to its current home of Fiesta Gardens, a beautiful park along the shores of Lady Bird Lake, on Austin’s East Side.



What stayed the same through the years is a line-up of world-class musical acts on stage from noon to five and an orderly array of tents and booths where the beer and hot sauce flow nonstop. The whole scene is framed by plumes of sweet-smelling smoke rising from barbecue rigs, fajita grills, and green chile roasters, putting a lovely blue haze on the proceedings.

In the first few years of the competition, nearly all of the entries were Mexican table sauces—a few green, but mostly red. We also got a few moles and other specialties. So early on, we established categories for red, green, and special variety hot sauces. Commercial pepper sauces that were marketed in shaker bottles (like Tabasco) were judged by attendees on the festival grounds. The winner was awarded the “People’s Choice” Award.

In organizing the judging, we tried to establish parameters for the various styles of hot sauces, but we found that a consensus was impossible. Anyone is free to call their hot sauce anything they like. But for the sake of clarity in this book, I’ve compiled a short glossary of hot sauce–related terms, based on the definitions we use at the Hot Sauce Festival. You can find the glossary on the inside back cover of this book.

ROASTED GREEN CHILES

————Yields 5 or 6 roasted chiles————

In late August and early September, chile sellers set up their giant propane-fired rolling drum roasters at grocery stores and farmers’ markets in New Mexico. Many people buy a whole year’s supply of roasted chiles at this time of the year and freeze them. If you don’t have a supply of roasted chiles in your freezer, it’s easy enough to roast your own. You can use this technique for roasted poblanos, bell peppers, and Padrón peppers, too.

5 or 6 fresh green chiles

Vegetable oil (optional)

Place the whole fresh chiles over a high gas flame and turn them as needed to blister the skin on all sides. Don’t allow the flame to burn too long in one place or you’ll burn through the chiles. After most of the skin has been well blistered, wrap the warm chiles in wet paper towels, place them inside a plastic bag, and set them aside to steam gently for 10 to 15 minutes. When you remove the towel, most of the skins should come off easily. Scrape off the rest of the skins with a butter knife. If you are making chiles rellenos, remove the seeds carefully and try to keep the peppers intact (it’s not easy). Otherwise, remove the stems and cut the peppers into strips or chop them up, depending on the recipe.

If you don’t have a gas range, put the chiles in a skillet with a little vegetable oil and blister them over high heat. Proceed as directed above.

ESCABECHE

(Pickled Peppers)

————Makes about 2 quarts or 1½ pounds (drained)————

This blend of pickled chile peppers, carrots, and onions with seasonings is a favorite condiment. You can use the pickling liquid as a pepper sauce.

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 small onion, thickly sliced

5 cloves garlic, peeled and quartered

8 cups water

15 jalapeño chiles (about 1 pound)

1 pound carrots, peeled and sliced ½ inch thick (about 2 cups)

1¼ cups cider vinegar

Pickling salt

1 teaspoon dried Mexican oregano

4 bay leaves

White vinegar

Heat the oil in a large soup pot over medium-high heat. Add the onion and sauté for 3 minutes, then add the garlic. Continue cooking until the onions are soft, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the water and bring to a boil. Add the jalapeños and carrots and cook for 5 minutes, or until slightly softened. Add the cider vinegar, 1 tablespoon pickling salt, oregano, and bay leaves and simmer for another minute. Remove from the heat and allow to cool.

Transfer the jalapeños, carrots, and onions with a slotted spoon or tongs into sterilized glass quart-size jars (you may need several). When the cooking liquid has cooled, cover the vegetables with liquid until the jars are three-quarters full. Add 1 tablespoon pickling salt to each jar and fill to the top with white vinegar. Cap each jar tightly and store in the refrigerator for up to several months.



[Fried Chiles](#)

FRIED CHILES

(Chiles Toreados)

————Serves 4 to 6————

In the taverns of Galicia, they serve lightly salted, fried Padrón peppers for a snack. At the hundred-year-old bar called El Indio Azteca in Monterrey, Mexico, they serve fried serranos the same way. The serranos are a lot hotter. Jalapeños are also served fried in Mexico, sometimes topped with a little cheese. Serve with beer or cocktails.

8 ounces green Padrón peppers, Fresno chiles, serrano chiles, or jalapeño chiles

½ cup olive oil

Salt (preferably good-quality sea salt)

Arrange the chiles in a single layer in a frying pan and drizzle with the olive oil. Place over a medium flame and cook for 2 to 3 minutes, until the chiles sizzle. Turn the heat to low and cook, turning often, until the chiles are soft and the skin is loose, 10 to 15 minutes, or to the desired texture. Drain on paper towels. Lightly salt the warm chiles and serve them, skins and all, on a small plate.



MESOAMERICAN CHILMOLES

Archaeological research suggests that some Mexican-style hot sauces we eat today are similar to those eaten by ancient Mesoamericans. Chile peppers, along with corn, beans, and squash, were the first plants cultivated in the New World. Excavations in Tamaulipas, in Northern Mexico, and in Tehuacán, in Puebla, both revealed pepper remains at the very earliest levels, dating chile pepper consumption back to at least 7000 BC.

In Oaxaca, modern Zapotec cooking is so close to its roots that archaeologists are studying the food of remote villages in the mountains in order to make sense of pottery shards they have found at Monte Albán dating from thousands of years ago. On a visit to the lab of Dr. Marcus Winter, a researcher in the archaeology section of the Mexican National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), he explained that the rough mountainous countryside of Oaxaca provides the isolation that has allowed Zapotec culture to remain largely unaffected by outside influences.

The Zapotec tribe was never conquered by the Aztecs or the Spanish, which is why the Zapotec language is still spoken in rural Oaxaca today. But that's not the only explanation for the unchanging nature of the food. "A lot of the reason is economic," says Winter. "The food hasn't changed because of autoproduction—people here still eat what they grow."

According to Dr. Winter, two ancient pottery vessels in particular influenced Mexican cooking thousands of years ago. One is a piece of a curved pottery tortilla griddle, or comal. During the early urban stage of Monte Albán, the comal became common in households all over the valley of Oaxaca and probably elsewhere in Mexico.

He showed me a fragment of a clay comal, which is flat in the middle, with a curved edge that rises away from the center. It is identical in size and shape to the metal comals that are set over open fires to make Oaxacan tortillas and the toasted bean-coated tortillas called tlayudas today. By observing the use of the modern-day comal, archaeologists have deduced the reason for its shape. Then, as now, the tortilla is formed and placed in the hot center of the comal to cook, then it is moved to the higher edge to turn the cooked tortilla into another familiar food—the tostada.

While modern-day Americans may value the tostada for its unique ability to stand up to salsa, in ancient Mesoamerica, its most important attribute was its long shelf life. While a regular tortilla would become moldy after a few days, a tostada would last unspoiled for weeks. "The tostada was one of the first portable foods," Dr. Winter observed. "Mobility was a key factor in development at that time, and the tostada was the key to mobility." Portable food made it possible to trade with distant lands, to tend fields in other places, and to attend a festival that lasted several days, Winter said.

Another vessel that Winter showed me had an equally impressive effect on Mexican cooking. The Suchilquitongo bowl, named after a Oaxacan village where several complete examples were discovered, is a round vessel with thick, ridged walls. Winter points to a fragment from the inside of the bowl that shows heavy wear. While the flat stone on legs called a metate was used for corn and heavier grinding, the Suchilquitongo bowls were used to mash relatively soft foods.

Like a modern food processor, the grinding bowl made it possible to mash things together to form a sauce. "We know they had avocados, because we have found fossilized avocado pits," Winter tells me. "And we assume they had miltomates (husked tomatoes) and chiles." Residue studies on the pottery fragments will someday yield a more exact ingredient list for Mesoamerican salsas and guacamoles.

"The innovations that took place at Monte Albán during the early urban stage were extraordinary," Winter says. Monumental architecture, astronomy, carved glyphs, and new methods of food preparation all appear to have originated by the second century BC and to have spread from Monte Albán, which is the oldest known city in Mesoamerica, to other civilizations. "Monte Albán was the ancient Greece to Teotihuacan's Rome," Winters says.

The Aztecs get most of the attention in any discussion of pre-Columbian cooking, but they didn't even arrive in the Valley of Mexico until the thirteenth century, just a few hundred years ahead of the Spanish. The food innovations of the Zapotecs and other ancient Mesoamericans, on the other hand, date back to long before the time of Christ. But what's really amazing is that we are still eating the same Mesoamerican tostadas and salsa five hundred years after the Conquest.



[“Son of Suchilquitongo” Salsa Verde](#)

“SON OF SUCHILQUITONGO” SALSA VERDE

————Makes 3½ cups————

Here is a modern version of the ancient green salsas made by the Zapotecs in Suchilquitongo bowls. If you want to know what the ancient version tasted like, taste it before you add the garlic and lime juice. This is a great table sauce, as well as the perfect sauce for enchiladas verdes.

1 pound tomatillos, husked and washed
1 cup chopped fresh cilantro
3 fresh serrano chiles, stemmed, seeded, and minced
1 cup minced sweet onion
2 teaspoons minced garlic
Pinch of sugar
¼ cup freshly squeezed lime juice
Salt (preferably good-quality sea salt)

Put the cleaned tomatillos in a saucepan and cover with water. Bring to a boil, then turn off the heat and allow the tomatillos to soak for 5 minutes. Remove from heat, drain, and purée in a food processor. Add the cilantro, serranos, onion, garlic, sugar, and lime juice to the food processor and pulse three or four times to combine. Season with salt to taste. Serve immediately, or store in the refrigerator for up to a week.

ROASTED GREEN CHILE SAUCE

————Makes about 6 cups————

This is the traditional New Mexican–style green chile sauce. Add some chicken to make it into a stew, or pour it over your eggs for breakfast.

Roast the chiles using the method [here](#).

4 cups chicken stock (or substitute vegetable stock)
2 cups chopped [roasted](#) Anaheim chiles
5 tomatillos, [cooked](#) and puréed
2 teaspoons minced onion
1 teaspoon dried Mexican oregano
1 garlic clove, minced
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon white pepper
2 tablespoons cornstarch dissolved in 2 tablespoons water

Combine the stock, chiles, tomatillo purée, onion, oregano, garlic, salt, and white pepper in a saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the cornstarch mixture and stir well. Cook until well thickened, 5 to 10 more minutes. Serve immediately, or store in the refrigerator for up to a week.

Green Eggs: Ladle the warm sauce over two fried eggs on a warm plate and serve with refried beans and tortillas.

Chicken Chile: Add 2 to 3 cups of chopped raw chicken meat and simmer until the chicken is fully cooked.

Green Chile Frito Pie: Spread Fritos in a baking pan and ladle some sauce or Chicken Chile over them, then top with shredded cheese. Bake for a few minutes at 350°F or until the cheese melts.

Cooking Tomatillos

Remove the husks and rinse well. Simmer the tomatillos in barely boiling water for 7 to 10 minutes, or until they are soft. Alternatively, place the rinsed tomatillos on a hot grill and cook, turning frequently, for about 5 minutes or until they are soft but not bursting.



[Easy Mole Poblano](#)

EASY MOLE POBLANO

————Makes 2 cups————

There are many moles in Mexico—there are the proverbial seven moles of Oaxaca (negro, colorado, amarillo, verde, chichilo, coloradito, and mancha manteles), and there are fruit, nut, and herb moles. But when you mention mole, most people think of mole poblano, the dried chile mole with the chocolate in it. Recipes for authentic mole poblano can be found in many Mexican cookbooks; they may contain up to twenty-four ingredients and daunting techniques. If those recipes aren't complicated enough, my friend chef Hugo Ortega at Hugo's in Houston roasts his own cocoa beans and grinds his own chocolate for his mole. Mole makers seem to feel that the more arcane they can make the process, the better. One Mexican author says that to appreciate mole poblano, you have to share the Mexican love for the baroque. + Most Mexican home cooks buy ready-made mole paste in a Mexican market. There are also some excellent bottled brands being imported from Oaxaca. Or you can cheat. Here's a simplified mole recipe that you can whip up in a few minutes. Your friends will be amazed—just go ahead and let them believe that it took all day.

- 2 ancho chiles
- 1 pasilla chile
- 1 guajillo chile
- 1½ cups chicken stock
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ onion, sliced
- 2 tomatoes, quartered
- 1 ounce semisweet chocolate pieces
- 1 teaspoon tahini
- 1 teaspoon almond butter
- 1 tablespoon smooth peanut butter
- ½ teaspoon sugar
- Salt

Stem and seed the chiles, tear them up, and put them into a saucepan with the chicken stock over medium heat. Bring to a boil and then turn off the heat and allow the chiles to soak for 10 minutes, or until soft. Remove the chiles and reserve the chicken stock.

In a saucepan, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the garlic and onion and cook until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes, ancho chile, pasilla chile, guajillo chile, chocolate, tahini, almond butter, peanut butter, sugar, and chicken stock. Simmer for 5 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a blender and purée until smooth. If the texture is still gritty, return the mole to the blender and purée again. Serve immediately, or use as a sauce for braised chicken or [chicken enchiladas](#). Tightly sealed, this sauce will keep in the refrigerator for up to a week.



[Chicken Enchiladas](#)

CHICKEN ENCHILADAS

————Makes 8 enchiladas; serves 4————

Enchiladas are a great way to use up leftover chicken. It doesn't matter if the chicken you use to stuff the tortillas is grilled, barbecued, boiled, or fried. Here's a standard procedure for making chicken enchiladas—pick the sauce that you like best.

6 tablespoons olive oil

¼ cup diced onion

4 cups shredded cooked chicken, chopped

2 cups sauce, such as “Son of Suchilquitongo” [Salsa Verde](#), [Roasted Green Chile Sauce](#), [David Garrido's Ancho-Tomatillo Sauce](#), or [Easy Mole Poblano](#)

8 corn tortillas

½ cup crumbled queso blanco, for garnish (optional)

2 tablespoons lightly toasted sesame seeds, for garnish (optional)

Preheat the oven to 300°F. Grease a 9 by 13-inch baking dish.

In a skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until wilted, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the chicken and cook until the chicken is heated, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from the heat and place in a bowl with ½ cup of the sauce. Toss well and set aside.

Wipe out the skillet, add the remaining 4 tablespoons of olive oil, and place over medium heat. When the oil is hot, dip a tortilla into the oil and cook until soft, 10 to 15 seconds on each side. Drain on a paper towel. Repeat with the remaining tortillas.

Divide the chicken mixture evenly among the tortillas, roll them up, and tightly pack the rolled tortillas seam side down in the baking dish. Pour the remaining 1½ cups sauce over them.

Bake for 12 to 15 minutes, or until bubbling hot. Remove from the oven and transfer to plates. If you have made green enchiladas, garnish with the queso blanco. If you have made mole enchiladas, garnish with a sprinkling of sesame seeds.

DAVID GARRIDO'S ANCHO-TOMATILLO SAUCE

————Makes 2 cups————

David Garrido has been a judge at the Austin Chronicle Hot Sauce Festival for more than a decade. He is also the chef and owner of Garrido's, an upscale taco stand and cocktail bar in Austin. David coauthored a cookbook with me, *Nuevo Tex-Mex*, in 1998. The book is now out of print, but it included this recipe for one of the tastiest tomatillo sauces of all time. The ancho-tomatillo combination was inspired by a similar sauce from Patricia Quintana.

4 tablespoons olive oil

½ medium onion, thinly sliced

1 serrano chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced

1 garlic clove, minced

6 tomatillos, husked and quartered

2 ancho chiles, stemmed and seeded

2 guajillo chiles, stemmed and seeded

1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice

¼ cup chicken stock

1 cup chopped fresh cilantro

Heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until light brown, about 6 minutes. Add the serrano,

garlic, tomatillos, anchos, guajillos, and chicken stock. Lower the heat and simmer until the chiles are soft, 5 to 7 minutes.

Transfer the mixture to a blender, add the cilantro, and purée until smooth. Strain and add salt to taste.

In another skillet over high heat, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil and carefully pour the sauce from the blender into the skillet; bring to a boil, 1 to 2 minutes.

Use immediately as a sauce for tacos or chicken enchiladas, or chill and serve as a table sauce. This sauce will keep in the refrigerator for up to a week.

MOLCAJETE SAUCE

————Makes 2 to 3 cups————

The recipe for this sauce originated in Northern Mexico where mesquite grilling has been the preferred cooking method since prehistoric times—tomatoes and chile peppers get a lovely char on the grill. As the name implies, this table sauce is traditionally made in the three-legged stone mortar and pestle called a molcajete. The stone mortar is considered superior to modern appliances for making salsas, guacamole, and other blended mixtures that need to retain some of their chunkiness. It's also an attractive serving dish. + Molcajetes must be seasoned before use as the porous lava rock usually contains a lot of grit. To season a molcajete, first rinse as much of the grit out as you can, then grind a couple of fresh chile peppers in it. Discard the pepper mash and put the molcajete in a hot oven or out in the sun until it dries it out. The molcajete always retains a little of the flavor of the last thing you ground up in it.

3 large tomatoes, quartered

½ onion, sliced in rings

2 cloves garlic, peeled

2 jalapeño chiles, stemmed and halved lengthwise

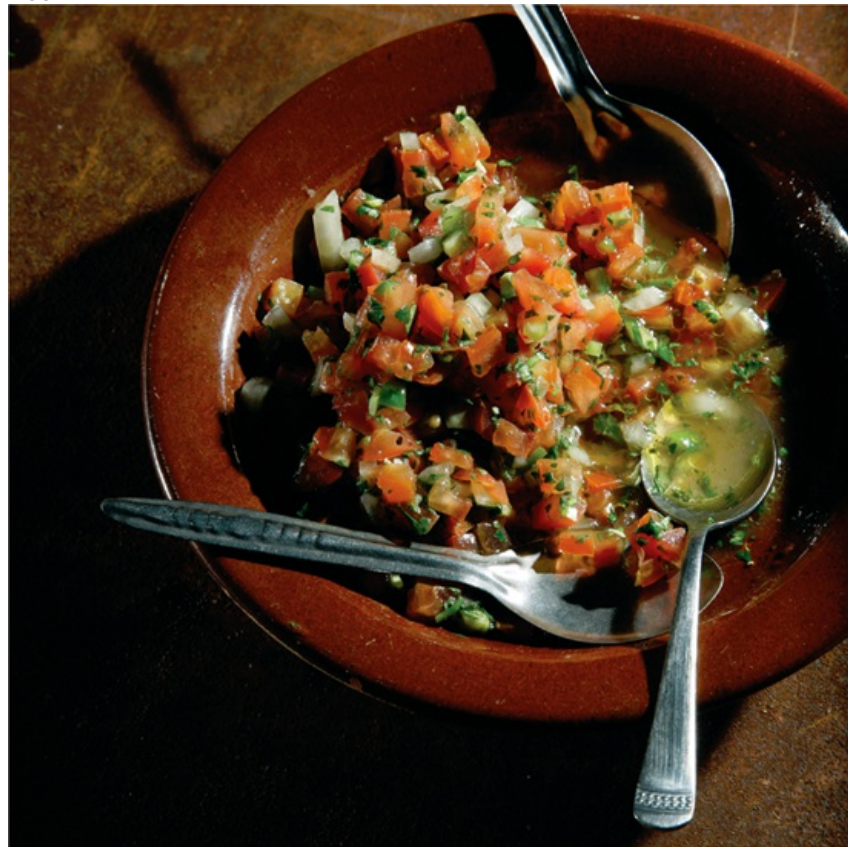
1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice

½ cup chopped fresh cilantro

Salt

Prepare a fire in a grill using mesquite charcoal.

Place the tomatoes, onions, garlic, and jalapeños in a grill basket and grill for at least 10 minutes, turning several times until wilted and well charred. (Or alternately char in a dry skillet on the stove top.) Remove some of the charred skin from the tomatoes and chile peppers, then transfer the tomatoes, onions, and jalapeños to a molcajete or food processor. Add the lemon juice and grind or process so the mixture remains chunky. Transfer to a bowl and add the cilantro. Season with salt and stir. Use immediately as a table sauce or tortilla chip dip, or refrigerate for up to a week.



[Pico De Gallo](#)

PICO DE GALLO

————Makes 2½ cups————

Salsa cruda is usually made in a blender or molcajete, while pico de gallo is chopped by hand. To take this recipe to the next level, use heirloom tomatoes, very sweet onions (such as Texas 1015, Walla Walla, or Vidalia), and the very best sea salt. Soaking the onions in the lime juice “cooks” them the same way it cooks the fish in ceviche.

3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lime juice

½ cup chopped sweet onion

2 cups chopped, very ripe tomatoes

2 tablespoons minced [jalapeño chiles](#), [serrano chiles](#), [chile pequins](#), or [poblano rajas](#)

½ teaspoon salt (preferably good-quality sea salt), plus more as needed

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, plus more as needed

2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro

Dash of olive oil

Combine the lime juice and onions in a bowl and allow to marinate for 20 minutes or up to an hour.

Combine the tomatoes, onion mixture, chiles, salt, pepper, cilantro, and olive oil in a mixing bowl and mix well. Adjust the seasonings to taste.

Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. Serve cold.



[Mexican Shrimp Cocktail](#)

MEXICAN SHRIMP COCKTAIL

————Serves 2————

Shrimp cocktails have all but disappeared from American restaurant menus, but they are as popular as ever in Mexico. If you've ever vacationed at a seaside resort in Cancún or Acapulco, you are probably already a fan of this famous appetizer. Known as coctel de camarones on the Pacific Coast and coctel de Campechana on the Gulf Coast, this is everybody's favorite Mexican seafood dish. When it's hot outside, you'll want to make it extra spicy. It is perfect on a hot day with margaritas or [micheladas](#). Cholula is a favorite Mexican hot sauce in Texas and in the Southwest; it is made with chile de árbol and chile pequin.

½ cup ketchup

¼ cup freshly squeezed lime juice

About ¼ cup Cholula hot sauce or [Homemade Pepper Sauce](#)

¼ cup olive oil

Pinch of salt

Freshly ground black pepper

½ cup [Pico de Gallo](#)

½ avocado, cut into small chunks

10 jumbo shrimp, shelled, deveined, and steamed

2 cilantro sprigs

Saltines, to serve

Tortilla chips and salsa, to serve

Combine the ketchup, lime juice, hot sauce, and olive oil and stir. Add the salt, pepper, pico de gallo, the avocado, and the shrimp. Stir gently to combine. Spoon into two chilled cocktail glasses or beer schooners. Garnish with the cilantro sprigs. Serve with saltines, tortilla chips, and salsa.

MICHELADA

————Makes 1————

Michelada means “my cold beer” in Spanish. It's a cold beer with hot sauce in the mug and salt on the rim. The chile de árbol flavor of Cholula is a favorite for this.

½ lime

Coarse sea salt

2 dashes Worcestershire sauce

1 teaspoon Cholula hot sauce or [Homemade Pepper Sauce](#)

1 (12-ounce) bottle Dos Equis Lager, Corona, or other Mexican beer

Salt the rim of a chilled beer mug by rubbing it with the lime and dipping it in the coarse salt. Squeeze the lime into the mug. Add the Worcestershire and Cholula hot sauce. Pour in the beer and serve.

Los Big Shots: La Fisheria, a Mexican seafood restaurant in Houston, serves “Los Big Shot,” a beery version of the Mexican seafood cocktail. To make one at home, mix up a michelada and then stir six boiled shrimp and/or raw oysters into it. First you eat the spicy shrimp with a spoon and then you drink the seafood and hot sauce–flavored beer.



[Sikil Pak](#)

SIKIL PAK

————Makes about 3 cups————

In the Mayan language, sikil mean “tomato” and pak means “pumpkin seed.” This addictively delicious dip explains a lot about the Mesoamerican agricultural trinity of squash, corn, and beans. While the corn and beans always made sense, I could never figure out why squash was such a big deal. You don’t see a lot of people eating squash in Mexican restaurants these days. + Eventually, I learned that it wasn’t the squash itself that was valued so highly, it was the seed. The green inner kernel of the squash or pumpkin seed is high in nutritious oils and tastes wonderful when roasted and ground. The mole sauce called pipian is one illustration of how the seeds can be used—sikil pak is another. + The satisfying density of the dip might remind you of a pumpkin seed hummus. You can make it in a blender, but you may need to add some water to get the blades going. The old-fashioned way to make it is to roast the pumpkin seeds and tomatillos and grind them with the chile and garlic into a fine paste in a molcajete; a lot of people insist the texture of sikil pak made in a molcajete is unbeatable. + Personally, I prefer the ease of a heavy-duty high-speed blender (such as a Vitamix or Blendtech). You just dump everything in the jar, hit the accelerator, and whiz the whole thing into a paste.

2 cups (8 ounces) hulled pumpkin seeds (the green inner part)

4 tomatillos

1 clove garlic

1 to 2 habanero-type chiles, stemmed and halved

¼ cup olive oil

¼ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice

Water

A few whole pumpkin seeds, for garnish

Tortilla chips or crackers, to serve

In a large frying pan over high heat, dry roast the pumpkin seeds until they begin to pop, shaking and turning frequently, about 5 minutes. Transfer the roasted seeds to a bowl to cool.

Husk the tomatillos, rinse them well, put them in the hot frying pan along with the garlic, and roast for a few minutes or until the tomatillos and garlic are lightly charred.

Combine the roasted seeds, tomatillos, garlic, chiles, olive oil, and lemon juice in a molcajete, adding water as needed until the mixture turns into a smooth paste, about 15 minutes. Or grind in a food processor into a smooth paste, adding water as needed to get the mixture turning. The finished dip should be about the consistency of chunky peanut butter.

To serve, put the paste in a bowl or molcajete and garnish with a few whole pumpkin seeds. Use as a dip with tortilla chips or crackers.

XNIPEC

————Makes 1½ cups————

This habanero-flavored pico de gallo is used throughout the Yucatán. Xnipec is the Mayan word for “panting dog.” The name describes the tongue-hanging-out reaction to eating something very hot—eat some of this sauce all by itself, and you’ll see what they mean. It’s much tastier as an addition to other dishes like [Ensalada de Nopalitos](#).

1 red onion, minced

Juice of 4 limes

4 habanero-type chiles, stemmed, seeded, and minced

1 tomato, finely diced

Salt

Water (optional)

Soak the onion in the lime juice for at least 30 minutes or up to 1 hour. Add the chiles and tomato and season with salt to taste. Mix well. Add a little water if you like a thinner sauce. Serve chilled with tortilla chips.

ENSALADA DE NOPALITOS

————Makes 6 servings————

Nopales are the pads of the prickly pear, or nopal, cactus. They are sold both whole (scraped of their thorns) and canned. If you buy them fresh, cut them into small strips for cooking. Mexican queso asadero is a mild white cheese found in specialty stores.

2 to 3 cups fresh nopales strips or 1 (16-ounce) jar nopalitos, drained and rinsed

1 tablespoon [Xnipec](#) or to taste

1 small red onion, sliced into thin rings

1 large tomato, diced

¼ cup sliced black olives

2 teaspoons chopped fresh cilantro

1 tablespoon olive oil

1½ tablespoons red wine vinegar

2 ounces freshly grated queso asadero or Monterey jack cheese

If you are using fresh nopales, bring a pot of salted water to a boil, then add the nopales strips and simmer for a few minutes until they are soft.

Drain and rinse the nopales.

In a serving bowl, combine the nopales, xnipec, onion, tomato, and olives. Toss with the cilantro, oil, and vinegar. Garnish with the cheese and serve.

DIY PACE PICANTE SAUCE

————Makes 2 cups————

Pace Picante sauce was invented in 1947 in the back of a liquor store by a young man named David Pace. The young Pace came from a family of Louisiana cane syrup makers. He also made syrups, jams, and jellies in the lab behind the liquor store that he and his wife ran in San Antonio. But it was his picante sauce—made with tomatoes, onions, garlic, and fresh jalapeños—that made him famous. Pace put the stuff on everything, including sandwiches, eggs, and chicken. Pace Picante Sauce was bought by the Campbell Soup Company in 1995. + If you want to make a picante sauce that tastes exactly like the bottled stuff at the grocery store, try this recipe. Use it as a table sauce, taco sauce, or chip dip, or as ranchero sauce in dishes such as huevos rancheros.

1 (10.75 ounce) can tomato purée

1 cups water

⅓ cup chopped onion

¼ cup chopped fresh jalapeño chiles with seeds

2 tablespoons white vinegar

¼ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon dried onion flakes

¼ teaspoon dried garlic flakes

Combine the tomato purée, water, onion, jalapeños, vinegar, salt, dried onion flakes, and dried garlic flakes in a saucepan over medium heat.

Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 30 minutes, or until thick.

Remove from the heat and let cool. When cool, place in a covered container and refrigerate overnight. Store in the refrigerator for up to a week.



From left: [Pepper Vinegar](#), [Pepper Sherry](#), [“Son of Suchilquitongo” Salsa Verde](#), and [Papaya Fire](#)

ISLAND HEAT

Like the first sip of a frozen mango daiquiri on a hot afternoon, the sweet fire of Caribbean-style hot sauces sends a shudder of delight through your whole body. The tropical fruit and citrusy peppers get perfumed with all manner fresh herbs, ginger, and allspice in the hot sauces of the islands. When this style of salsa started turning up at the Austin Chronicle Hot Sauce Festival in the mid-1990s, we didn't know exactly what to do with it. These sauces weren't intended as a dip for tortilla chips, they were made to be eaten on grilled fish or with curries or wrapped up in flatbreads called "rotis." We tasted them on the tip of a plastic spoon.

The habaneros, Scotch bonnets, and other cultivars of the explosively hot *Capsicum chinense* species may be among the hottest in the world, but the wonderful apricot, peach, and citrus aromas that you smell when you cut one open can change your attitude about hot and spicy food. Caribbean peppers and hot sauces became something of an obsession with me, and I spent a lot of time in the islands. In 1995, I won my first James Beard Journalism Award for a magazine article about my piquant quest—it was titled "Hot Sauce Safari."

If an obsession with hot peppers sounds a little silly, consider the mindset of the Spanish who bankrolled Columbus. To say that the Europeans were looking for a shorter route to the Spice Islands doesn't begin to explain it. In the medieval imagination, pepper, cinnamon, and ginger came from Adam and Eve's lost paradise, according to German author Wolfgang Schivelbusch in his book, *Tastes of Paradise*. Europeans were more than a little obsessed with spicy food.

With poetry, art, and historical accounts, Schivelbusch illustrates the absolute frenzy over spices during the Middle Ages. By the fifteenth century, Europe's entire system of social status and a large part of its economy were defined by spices, and every entrepreneur and adventurer alive was trying to find a new route to the paradise where spices grew.

The early history of the Caribbean islands was shaped by the spice trade. Columbus thought he had landed in the East Indies, which is why he called the natives "Indians." The fiery chile pepper pods that the Caribbean natives called *aji* were renamed "pimiento" by the Spanish after *pimienta*, the word for black pepper. Strangely, they called the fruit of the allspice tree, the other spice they discovered in the New World, *pimiento* as well. (It wasn't until the Spanish encountered the Aztecs that they coined the term "chile.")

Ajis, or chile peppers, weren't related to black pepper, but thanks to their hardiness, they spread quickly. Within ten years, the Spanish and Portuguese had carried chile peppers all over the world. Asians, Africans, and Europeans quickly forgot that the chile peppers in their gardens were originally brought from the Americas in the 1500s and came to believe their local peppers were native. When early English settlers came to the United States, they brought European chile peppers with them, along with other plants and seed they thought they might need in the Americas.

Though Columbus failed to reach the East Indies by sailing west, the agricultural products of the New World replaced the spices of the East Indies in economic and cultural importance. Just as black pepper and cinnamon had created immense fortunes in the Middle Ages, chocolate, coffee, and sugar created enormous wealth in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It wasn't just the utility of these products that made them desirable, Schivelbusch argues. The Caribbean replaced the Spice Islands as the earthly paradise of the European imagination.

PEPPERPOT AND BARBECUE

The Arawaks migrated gradually across the islands from present-day Guyana. Along with the *Capsicum chinense* pepper (*aji*), they brought cassava, pineapple, and maize with them from South America. For some ten centuries, the Caribbean islands as far north as Jamaica belonged exclusively to these peaceful fishermen and farmers.

The Arawaks lived in villages and had a communal style of cooking. The game they killed ended up in a constantly cooking stewpot. The stew, flavored with peppers and the cassava preparation called *cassareep*, was called *ajiaco*, or pepperpot. The earliest descriptions of Amerindian pepperpots by European explorers noted ingredients like bamboo shoots, buds of trees, and other wild greens.

In the eighth or ninth century, another South American tribe called the Caribs began to invade the Arawak villages in their huge war canoes. By the time the Spanish arrived in the fifteenth century, the Arawaks and Caribs had merged into a single culture with a shared language. From the Caribbean natives, Europeans learned the cooking technique we call "barbecue," a word that comes from the Taino dialect of the Arawak-Carib language.

Other Arawak-Carib words that entered the English language include canoe, hammock, hurricane, and *tomalley*. In English, *tomalley* is a cooking term used to describe the greenish innards of a crab or lobster. Crab *tomalley* was especially important to the Caribs because it was the main ingredient in their favorite hot sauce, *taumalin*. If you want to sample some, just mix the warm *tomalley* from a boiled crab with some minced habanero.

Most Caribbean peppers are descendants of South American *aji* peppers that were brought to the islands by ancient peoples. Americans use the Mexican name *habanero*, (which means "from Havana" in Spanish) to describe these peppers. The Scotch bonnets of Jamaica, the bullnose peppers of Guyana, the Caribe peppers of Barbados, the *piment* of French-speaking Guadeloupe, and the *bonda man jack* of the jungle island of Dominica are all strikingly similar. All of these chiles are cultivars of the extremely hot *Capsicum chinense* species. They give hot sauces, callaloes, curries, jerks, rundowns, and all the other hot and spicy dishes of the islands their distinctive, flavorful heat. And they are the heart and soul of Caribbean cuisine.

PEPPER CRABS

—Serves 4—

This simple method of preparing crabs is very close to the original Amerindian recipe. The Caribs cooked the crabs very briefly; they preferred them underdone. Crabs are the only food the Arawaks and Caribs ever boiled; everything else they roasted.

3 gallons water
1 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon allspice berries
6 to 8 thyme sprigs
2 to 3 whole habanero-type chiles
8 live blue crabs
3 limes, cut in half

Taumalin Sauce (below), optional

Put the water in a large pot and add the salt, then bring to a boil. Add the allspice, thyme, and chiles, and simmer 2 to 3 minutes. Carefully add the live crabs. Boil them for about 15 minutes until red and cooked through. Remove the crabs from the water and let them cool. Discard the cooking liquid.

Break off the apron (for female crabs) or key (for male crabs), then pull off the top shell. Rub off the feather gills and break the body in two.

Reserve the soft yellow-green innards to make taumalin (below). Squeeze lime juice over the exposed meat. Break the shell as you eat, and suck the crab meat out of every joint. Dip the crab meat in taumalin sauce, if desired. Twist off the claws, break them open, and pick or suck out the meat.

You can also pick out the crabmeat from the Pepper Crabs to use in other recipes.

Taumalin Sauce: Combine $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of reserved tomalley with $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of minced habanero, [Caribbean Pepper Mash](#), or a habanero-based pepper sauce. Use as a dip for seafood.

CARIB CRAB SALSA

————Makes about 3 cups————

The ancient Carib salsa is very close in flavor to crab ceviche. If you want to taste the authentic version, boil your own crabs and combine the yellow-green liver from the inside of the crab shells with some minced habanero. But I think you'll agree that this tamaulin-inspired crab salsa tastes a lot better with the addition of onion, cilantro, and citrus juice. Serve as a cocktail mixed with chilled boiled shrimp, as a salsa with grilled fish, or over greens or guacamole as a salad.

6 [Pepper Crabs](#) or $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups lump crab meat (8 ounces)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup freshly squeezed lime juice

1 habanero-type chile, minced

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped red onion

4 scallions, white and green parts, trimmed and chopped

1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped bell pepper

Salt

Working over a mixing bowl to catch as much juice as possible, twist off the crab claws, break them open, pick out the meat, and put in the bowl.

Break off the apron (or key) and rub off the feather gills. Remove the crabmeat from the shells.

Add the lime juice, chile, onion, scallions, cilantro, and bell pepper. Season to taste with salt. Cover and chill for several hours before serving.



[Crab Backs](#)

CRAB BACKS

————Serves 6 as an appetizer————

This is yet another dish combining the flavors of crab, lime juice, and Caribbean pepper. Crab backs are popular all over the Caribbean.

6 [Pepper Crabs](#)

2 garlic cloves, minced
4 scallions, white and green parts, trimmed and chopped
Leaves from 1 sprig fresh thyme
Juice of 3 small Mexican limes, about 3 tablespoons
1 habanero-type chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
3 tablespoons dark rum
1 cup dried bread crumbs
Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Working over a mixing bowl to catch as much juice as possible, twist off the crab claws, break them open, pick out the meat, and put in the bowl. Break off the apron (or key), then pull off the top shell, but keep it intact. Rub off the feather gills and break the body in two. Remove the crabmeat from the shells.

Add the garlic, scallions, thyme, lime juice, chile, parsley, rum, and bread crumbs to the crabmeat. Mix well, mashing the mixture into a paste. Stuff the crab shells with the mixture and place stuffing side up on a baking sheet. Bake the stuffed crab backs for 20 minutes. Serve warm with [Papaya Fire](#) or your favorite Caribbean hot sauce on the side.

BOSTON BEACH JERK RUB

—————Makes 4 cups—————

The barbecue technique handed down from the Arawak-Carib people is famously preserved in Boston Beach, Jamaica, on the island's northwest coast. A metal grate has replaced the green sticks of the native Amerindians and corrugated zinc is more common than banana leaves as a covering; otherwise, the process looks a lot like the illustrations of the 1600s. + Boston Beach is not really a town; it's actually just a collection of "jerk shacks," bars, and spice stores. The jerk men tout their respective specialties, including jerk chicken, jerk sausage, and jerk pork. They also shill their own special blends of jerk seasoning. + There are several good commercial jerk seasonings available, including Walkerswood Traditional Jerk Seasoning and Jamaican Country Style Boston Dry Jerk Seasoning. But making your own jerk rub is easy and the flavor is far superior to anything you buy in a jar. Here's the recipe.

½ cup fresh thyme leaves
2 bunches (about 15) scallions, white and green parts, trimmed and chopped
¼ cup finely diced peeled fresh ginger
3 habanero-type chiles, stemmed but not seeded
¼ cup peanut oil
5 garlic cloves, chopped
3 bay leaves
1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon freshly ground coriander
2 teaspoons freshly ground allspice
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
1 teaspoon freshly ground cinnamon
Juice of 1 lime

Combine all the ingredients in a food processor. Process to a thick, chunky paste. You can store the sauce in a tightly sealed container in the refrigerator for several months.

JERK BARBECUE

Use a lot of jerk rub in proportion to the amount of meat—the jerk sauce will form a crust. + In Boston Beach, they use the wood of the pimento (allspice) tree for barbecue. At home, use charcoal briquettes to start the fire, then add chunks of sweet hardwoods, such as apple, peach, maple, walnut, pecan, or hickory.

Jerked Chicken

—————Serves 2 to 4—————

1 (3-pound) chicken, split in half
1 to 1½ cups [Boston Beach Jerk Rub](#)

On a cutting board, pack the wet jerk rub around both sides of the chicken halves and under the skin. Marinate in a sealed container in the refrigerator overnight.

About 1 hour before you are ready to grill, take the chicken out of the refrigerator and bring to room temperature. About 30 minutes before you are ready to grill, start the charcoal in a water smoker or covered grill. When the coals are covered with ash, spread out the coals and sear the chicken halves, turning to brown both sides. Set the chicken aside and place a drip pan in the grill, then surround the pan with the hot coals. Place the chicken directly over the drip pan to prevent flare-ups and cover the grill. After the meat begins sizzling, arrange the sweet wood around the coals (not on top) so the wood chunks smolder rather than burn. Keep the temperature between 250° and 275°F. Refuel with small amounts of charcoal and wood chunks as needed. Smoke the chicken for 1½ hours or until it reaches an internal temperature of 165°F; it should be crispy and well done, and the jerk rub should turn black and crusty.



[Jerked Pork](#)

Jerked Pork

————Serves 6————

1 (6-pound) bone-in pork shoulder (Boston butt)

2 to 3 cups [Boston Beach Jerk Rub](#)

Place the pork roast skin-side down on a cutting board, and cut it at 1½ inch intervals to within 1 inch of the shoulder blade bone. Massage the jerk rub deeply into the roast. Cover and marinate the roast in the refrigerator overnight.

About 1 hour before you are ready to grill, take the meat out of the refrigerator and bring to room temperature. About 30 minutes before you are ready to grill, start the charcoal in a water smoker or covered grill.

When the coals are covered with ash, place a drip pan in the grill and surround the pan with the hot coals. Place the meat directly over the drip pan to prevent flare-ups and cover the grill. After the meat begins sizzling, arrange the sweet wood around the coals (not on top) so the wood chunks smolder rather than burn. Keep the temperature between 250° and 275°F. Refuel with small amounts of charcoal and wood chunks as needed. Smoke the meat for 4 to 6 hours or until the internal temperature is 180° to 195°F; it should be crispy and well done, and the jerk rub should turn black and crusty. Allow the meat to rest for at least ten minutes, then slice and serve with rice and peas, stewed greens, or your favorite barbecue accompaniments.

Jerked Red Snapper

————Serves 4————

1 (2½-pound) whole red snapper, gutted and cleaned

1 cup [Boston Beach Jerk Rub](#)

Rinse the fish, remove the scales, and cut off the fins. With a sharp knife, make vertical slashes about 1½ inches apart along each side of the fish. Bend the fish so that the slashes on one side open to expose the meat, and pack each opening with jerk rub. Repeat on the other side. Wrap the fish in plastic wrap and marinate in the refrigerator for several hours.

About 1 hour before you are ready to grill, take the fish out of the refrigerator and bring to room temperature. About 30 minutes before you are ready to grill, start the charcoal in a water smoker or covered grill. When the coals are covered with ash, place a drip pan in the grill and surround the pan with the hot coals. Spread the fish's rib cage open wide, and stand the fish upright on the grill, directly over the drip pan to prevent flare-ups. After the fish begins sizzling, arrange the sweet wood around the coals (not on top) so the wood chunks smolder rather than burn. Keep the temperature between 250° and 275°F. Refuel with small amounts of charcoal and wood chunks as needed. Cook the fish for 30 minutes or until done throughout. At the table, remove the meat and crispy skin from the bones and serve with grilled pineapple, rice and peas, or your favorite accompaniments.

Jerked Lobster

————Serves 4————

4 spiny (or rock) lobster, about 2 pounds each

2 cups [Boston Beach Jerk Rub](#)

¾ cup softened unsalted butter

Split the shell of each spiny lobster down the middle of the underside. Stuff as much wet jerk rub as you can into the shell around the meat. Cover with plastic wrap. Marinate the lobsters for 4 hours in the refrigerator.

Just before broiling the lobsters, stuff 3 tablespoons of butter into each shell. Broil the lobster on the lower rack of the oven until the meat is white, about 10 minutes.

PEPPER SHERRY

————Makes 1 (750 ml) bottle————

The Amerindians cooked with fresh peppers. But the Europeans needed to find a way to preserve the peppers to take them back to the continent. The first and easiest method they came up with was to put the peppers in wine and use the seasoned wine as a sauce. Columbus carried sherry on his earliest voyages, while Portuguese ships were stocked with the fortified port called Madeira. + Pepper sherry is still a tradition in Bermuda where fine pepper sherries like Outerbridge's Original Sherry Pepper Sauce are aged in oak barrels with a touch of spices. Busha Browne's Spicy & Hot Pepper Sherry from Jamaica is also very popular. + Making pepper sherry is ridiculously easy: you just drop hot peppers into a sherry bottle. Chile pequins are usually used, because they fit easily into the mouth of the bottle. Many West Indians use immature pepper buds. + I use inexpensive sherry, but if you want to make pepper sherry from a Manzanilla or Amontillado, I am sure it will taste great.

1 (750 ml) bottle sherry (your choice of dry or sweet)

50 chile pequins or any hot chile that fits in the mouth of the bottle

Pour yourself a glass of sherry and drink it (this makes enough room in the bottle for the peppers). Pierce each chile with the point of a knife to allow the liquid to penetrate it, then add the chiles to the sherry. Allow the pepper sherry to age for a week or two before using it, and remember not to accidentally pour a glass for your grandmother.

PEPPER VINEGAR (PIQUE)

————Makes 1 pint————

In Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, pique is what they call a bottle of peppers steeped in vinegar. "Sport peppers" is the name for the bottle of peppers and vinegar you find on your table at restaurants in Louisiana. You sprinkle the pepper-laced vinegar on your food. After the vinegar is used up, the bottle is topped off with more vinegar. + In a restaurant in Jamaica, I found Scotch bonnets with carrots, onions, and spices in vinegar in a glass pancake-syrup dispenser with a plastic top. This ingenious arrangement allows you to take some peppers and hot vegetables out of the bottle so you to mash them in your stew or soup. You can get the same result by filling a pancake syrup dispenser with [Escabeche](#) along with enough of the pickling liquid to keep the peppers and vegetables submerged. + You can make pique in any bottle, big or small. Just increase or decrease the proportions to fit the bottle.

5 habanero-type chiles

1 carrot, peeled and chopped

1 small onion, chopped

4 garlic cloves, peeled

1 (1-inch) cube peeled fresh ginger

1 thyme sprig

1¾ cups cane, cider, or white wine vinegar

1 teaspoon rum

Make a small slit in each chile with the point of a knife to allow the liquid to penetrate it quickly. Stuff the chiles, carrot, onion, garlic, ginger, and thyme into a pint-size syrup dispenser. Add the vinegar and rum and wait a week for the flavor to develop, or you can hurry things up by heating the vinegar first. If you use hot vinegar, the pique will be ready in a few hours.

When you use all the vinegar, just add more. Again, heating the vinegar when you refill the bottle speeds the process. One bottle of peppers is good for three or four batches of pique.

VINEGAR BARBECUE SAUCE

————Makes about 6 cups————

English accounts of pig roasts in Jamaica from the 1600s describe the barbecue sauce as a mixture of vinegar and peppers. This sounds very close to the vinegar-based barbecue sauce of eastern North Carolina. Modern Carolina barbecue joints use distilled white vinegar or cider vinegar to make their barbecue sauces. Apple cider vinegar, with its tart apple aroma, was an important product on early American farms because it kept indefinitely at room temperature and sold for three times the price of hard cider. White vinegar is a modern industrial product made in huge batches; it has little or no taste or aroma, but is often infused with other flavors and colors. Europeans used wine vinegar for the earliest pepper sauces in the Caribbean. Cane vinegar became common during the era of sugar cane plantations. It has a pleasant trace of residual sugar. + If you are interested in experimenting, there are many options. Look for vinegar with 4 percent acetic acid (40-grain) when making sauces. Pickling vinegar should be between 40 and 50 (the USDA specifies 45 grains). Homemade vinegar is often below the 40-grain strength required for safe pickling, but it makes a wonderful barbecue sauce. If the vinegar you are using is higher than 40 grain, it should be diluted with water or other liquids until the acetic acid level equals 4 percent.

2 cups [Pepper Vinegar](#)

2 cups (70 grain) sherry vinegar, diluted with 1¾ cups water

2 tablespoons salt

¼ cup molasses

2 tablespoons freshly ground black pepper

1 tablespoon crushed chile pequin (or substitute dried red pepper flakes)

Combine all the ingredients in saucepan over medium heat and stir until the salt and molasses are dissolved. Allow to cool and transfer to a glass jar. Cover and store in the refrigerator for up to a month.

CARIBBEAN PEPPER MASH

————Makes about ¾ cup————

Many Caribbean cooks keep a jar of pepper mash in the fridge. It's a lot simpler than buying fresh peppers and chopping them up every time you cook. Be careful when making this with Capsicum chinense pods. These peppers are so hot that just touching the outsides will sometimes burn you. Don't be proud—wear rubber gloves.

4 ounces habanero-type chiles, stemmed but not seeded

About ½ cup vinegar

½ teaspoon salt

In a food processor or blender, grind the whole chiles with just enough vinegar to get the mash moving through the blades. Carefully transfer the mixture to a jar, close the jar tightly, and store it in the refrigerator. Use 1 teaspoon pepper mash in place of one fresh Caribbean pepper.

Fermented Habanero-Type Chile Mash: Ferment the peppers in a small canning jar following the instructions for [Fermented Pepper Mash](#). To substitute the fermented chiles for the fresh peppers in this recipe, add ½ cup brine from the jar, reduce the vinegar to ¼ cup, and omit the salt.

PAPAYA FIRE

————Makes 4 cups————

Classic Caribbean papaya sauces like Matouk’s of Trinidad are made with fermented pepper mash. The small, sweet Jamaican pawpaw is the favorite papaya in the islands. We use the larger, stronger-smelling Mexican papayas since they are easier to find in the American supermarket. Papaya is said to be an aid to digestion. The papain enzyme is also a natural tenderizer. If you marinate your fajitas or pork chops in this salsa before grilling, your meat will come out extra tender. Serve the sauce on the table in a squirt bottle, or use it as the base for freshly made table sauces, such as [Mango Salsa](#).

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

2 cups diced white onions

6 allspice berries

10 peppercorns

4 thyme sprigs

¼ cup finely diced peeled fresh ginger

¼ cup sugar

4 cups diced papaya

5 habanero-type chiles, stemmed but not seeded, or ½ cup fermented [habanero-type pepper mash](#)

1 cup cane or rice vinegar

¼ cup prepared mustard

2 tablespoons tamarind paste

Juice of 4 Mexican or key limes, about ¼ cup

Water

In a saucepan, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onions and sauté until they are transparent, about 3 to 5 minutes. Add the allspice, peppercorns, thyme, and ginger. Simmer the mixture for 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Add the sugar, papaya, and chiles. When the sugar has become syrupy, add the vinegar, mustard, and tamarind. Turn the heat to very low and simmer, covered, until the mixture is mush, about 10 more minutes. Turn off the heat and allow the covered pot to sit on the stove for an hour or more until completely cool.

Remove the thyme sprigs. Purée the mixture in a food processor; then pass it through a strainer, or purée it in a high-speed blender. Add lime juice to get the blades moving and balance the sweetness. Thin with water as necessary. The paste should be about the consistency of Sriracha sauce. Store in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to two weeks.

Papaya Curry Sauce: Add 1 tablespoon of curry powder with the mustard and proceed as directed.

Antigua Pineapple Salsa: In a glass bowl, combine cup Papaya Fire, 1 cup fresh pineapple plus 3 tablespoons pineapple juice, 1 minced red onion, 1 tablespoon minced and peeled fresh ginger, ¼ teaspoon ground allspice, ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg, ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, and ½ teaspoon salt. Mix well and refrigerate the sauce until chilled. Serve immediately—this goes great with grilled seafood (especially shrimp) and all kinds of pork dishes. Alternatively, try mixing 1 cup of the Pineapple Salsa with 4 cups of your favorite coleslaw, then serve on barbecued pork sandwiches.

MANGO SALSA

————Makes 1½ cups————

The red and green peppers may seem superfluous in this habanero salsa, but don’t leave them out. Along with the red onion, they add some color to the bright orange relish. This modern salsa tastes great on grilled salmon. It also makes an amazing shrimp cocktail.

1 teaspoon minced peeled fresh ginger

2 cups diced mango

3 tablespoons chopped fresh mint

1 cup minced red onion

½ cup minced green bell pepper

½ cup minced red bell pepper

Juice of 2 limes

Juice of 1 orange

½ cup [Papaya Fire](#) or 1 habanero-type chile, stemmed (but not seeded) and minced

½ teaspoon salt

Combine all ingredients in a bowl and chill for at least 15 minutes. Serve with grilled seafood or pork. Stored in a tightly sealed container in the refrigerator, this sauce will keep for one week.

Mango Salsa Shrimp Cocktail: Toss ½ cup Mango Salsa with 1 tablespoon ketchup and four boiled and peeled jumbo shrimp. Arrange in a 10-ounce martini glass and garnish with diced avocado. Serve with tortilla chips or saltines.

CHEZ FRANCINE’S SAUCE PIMENT

————Makes 2 cups————

I sampled this sauce at Chez Francine’s restaurant on the French island of Guadeloupe. It’s typical of the French Creole style in that it combines the Caribbean passion for peppers with European shallots, parsley, wine vinegar, and olive oil. Use it as a spicy salad dressing or a marinade for steak. The flavor might remind you of a spicy chimichurri.

1 habanero-type chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced, or 1 teaspoon [Caribbean Pepper Mash](#)

4 shallots, minced
½ cup chopped fresh parsley
1 cup Champagne vinegar
1 cup best-quality olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Process all the ingredients in a food processor or blender until well blended. (You can leave it chunky if you like, or process it until smooth.) Stored in a sterilized jar in the refrigerator, the sauce will keep for up to two weeks.

Steak St. Bart's: Pour 2 tablespoons Sauce Piment over two steaks in a covered container, toss well, and marinate overnight in the fridge. Grill as desired, then carve onto a platter and drizzle Sauce Piment over top of the steak slices. Put the rest of the sauce in a bowl and pass at the table.

PICKAPEPPA POT ROAST

————Serves 8————

Straight out of the bottle, Pickapeppa has a strangely sweet taste that might not seem like the best complement for a pot roast. But by the time the beef and gravy cook for several hours, the Pickapeppa mellows to a deliciously mild flavor that reminds many people of Worcestershire sauce. Serve with the Jamaican coat of arms (rice and beans), quinoa, or grits with some extra hot sauces on the side.

1 tablespoon vegetable oil or bacon drippings
4- to 5-pound beef pot roast (such as rump roast, brisket, or flank)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 cups chopped onions
2 cups chopped celery
2 cups chopped carrots
1 cup chopped green bell pepper
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 habanero-type chiles, stemmed (but not seeded) and minced
1½ cups beef broth
1 (5-ounce) bottle Pickapeppa Sauce
Preheat the oven to 350°F.

In a Dutch oven over medium-high heat, heat the oil. Season the roast with salt and pepper to taste and brown the meat on all sides. Remove the meat and add the onions, celery, carrots, green bell pepper, garlic, and chiles to the pot. Sauté until the onions are soft, about 5 minutes. Add the broth and return the roast to the pot. Pour the Pickapeppa sauce over top of the meat.

Cover and cook in the oven, turning once or twice so the meat cooks evenly, for 3 to 4 hours. When the meat is falling apart tender, remove the pot from the oven. Transfer the meat to a bowl and skim the excess fat from the liquid. Process the vegetables and pan juices with an immersion blender, or put about three-quarters of the cooked vegetables and some of the juice in a food processor or blender and purée. Return the purée to the pot to thicken the gravy. Adjust the seasonings. To serve, slice the pot roast and serve with gravy spooned over top.



[Backyard Oyster Bar](#)

LOUISIANA HOT SAUCES

While pepper sauces made with Tabasco and cayenne peppers have long been associated with Louisiana, they weren't actually invented there. A New Hampshire farmer advertised his cayenne pepper sauce in a Boston newspaper in 1807. Pepper sauces in glass bottles were imported from England along with mustard and horseradish in the early 1800s. Much of what we know about the history of these early pepper sauces has been deduced from the study of antique glass bottles. A dome-shaped bottle filled with vinegar and bird peppers was sold by J. McCollick & Company in New York sometime around 1850.

After the Civil War, Edmund McIlhenny put his bright red Tabasco-brand hot sauce in a cologne bottle and sealed it with green wax. Tabasco was patented in 1870. Today it is produced by a sixth-generation family business headquartered in Avery Island, Louisiana. Everything used in the early production of Tabasco sauce was produced on Avery Island. The island is an outcropping of an underground salt dome. The cane sugar plantation produced cane vinegar, and the peppers were grown on the island as well. Edmund McIlhenny's great-great-grandson, Paul C. P. McIlhenny runs the company today.

The name of the hot sauce comes from the tabasco pepper (*Capsicum frutescens* var. *tabasco*) of the Tabasco state in Mexico. Company literature once claimed that the McIlhenny plantation on Avery Island was the first place the peppers were grown in Louisiana. When that claim was challenged, the company employed a historian to sort out the many conflicting accounts. With his help, the company published the book titled, *Tabasco: An Illustrated History*.

As it turns out, a well-known plantation owner and Louisiana state legislator named Maunsel White actually grew tabasco peppers ten years before the McIlhennys. White's Concentrated Extract of Tabasco Sauce was praised in a New Orleans newspaper article that said a single drop of the sauce "will season a whole plate of soup." White's sauce was sold in a hand-blown bottle with a red devil trademark years before the McIlhenny's Tabasco sauce came along.

The ingredients of Maunsel White's and Edmund McIlhenny's tabasco sauces were similar: Each contained tabasco peppers, vinegar, and salt. But the recipes were worlds apart. White boiled the peppers with a little salt, mashed them, added vinegar, and put the strained contents in a bottle. The McIlhennys mashed very ripe peppers, mixed them with salt, and fermented the mash in bourbon barrels. The fermented mash was then blended with vinegar. About a month later, the pepper solids were strained out and the sauce was bottled.

Fermentation, the ancient method of preserving food, was the key to the process. Prior to 1941, when vinegar was standardized, fermentation was the primary method of pickling. By fermenting the pepper mash, the McIlhennys improved the flavor. And as anybody who has ever closely examined a Tabasco sauce bottle in a roadside diner can attest, fermented pepper mash thinned with vinegar will keep somewhere close to forever.

Of course, part of the success of Tabasco was an early focus on marketing. Edmund McIlhenny was an energetic promoter; he handed out flyers and gave away tiny bottles of Tabasco wherever he went. He hired drummers to take his product door to door. A New York grocery wholesaler, E. C. Hazzard, made Tabasco sauce popular on the East Coast.

A sales office in London opened in 1872. In 1895, British troops carried Tabasco sauce with them on their invasion of Khartoum. Over several decades, Tabasco became one of the most recognizable brands in the English-speaking world.

In 1898, a former Tabasco employee named B. F. Trappey opened a competing hot sauce company and began selling Trappey's Tabasco sauce. Ed Bulliard's Evangeline Tabasco Sauce, Gebhardt's Eagle Brand Tabasco Sauce, and several others were also marketed in the 1920s.

The Tabasco brand was trademarked by the McIlhenny family in 1906, but competitors argued that Tabasco was a kind of pepper, like cayenne, so the name couldn't be legally limited. For several decades, the McIlhennys tried to assert their exclusive right to the name. Finally in 1929, a court ruled in favor of their claim and other companies were ordered to stop using "Tabasco." The name was protected, but to this day competitors still sell fermented pepper sauces made in the same style under a variety of labels.

In 1918, Jacob Frank of the Frank Spice and Tea Company in Cincinnati, Ohio, contracted a Louisiana farmer named Adam Estilette to grow cayenne peppers to make a hot sauce according to a secret recipe he had purchased. Frank and Estilette became partners and worked on a new recipe that combined peppers, garlic, and spices. This blend was first marketed in 1920 as Frank's RedHot. In 1935, Teresa Bellissimo of the Anchor Bar and Grill in Buffalo, New York, used Frank's RedHot as the secret ingredient in the sauce she created for the first Buffalo chicken wings—its most famous use.

Today Frank's RedHot is made from peppers aged in New Mexico. Frank's extremely popular television commercials star a white-haired old lady named Ethel who tells Catholic priests, the Queen of England, and everyone else she meets that the secret of her recipes is Frank's RedHot, to which she adds, "I put that (expletive) on everything." The offending word is bleeped out. Frank's RedHot is currently the number-one best-selling pepper sauce in America. In a 2010 story in *Businessweek*, it was ranked number twelve on the list of the nation's most popular condiments, one rank ahead of Tabasco sauce and one behind Grey Poupon.

The third part of the American pepper sauce trinity is Texas Pete, a cayenne pepper and vinegar sauce from Winston-Salem, North Carolina. It is the most popular hot sauce in the Southeast and the third best-selling pepper sauce in the United States, after Frank's RedHot and Tabasco. With more vinegar than most pepper sauces, Texas Pete is a favorite in Southeastern barbecue joints.

It was invented by the Garner family. In 1929, at the age of sixteen, Thad Garner bought a barbecue stand called the Dixie Pig in Winston-Salem. With the restaurant came a hand-written recipe for barbecue sauce. When the rail yard of the Norfolk & Western Railroad expanded, the Dixie Pig lost its location. While Garner looked for a new building, the Dixie Pig's old customers kept asking for the restaurant's famous barbecue sauce, and so the Garner family started a barbecue sauce business in their farmhouse kitchen. In response to requests for a hotter barbecue sauce, the Garner family introduced Texas Pete. They reportedly chose the name because Texas was associated with chili and other hot and spicy foods in the popular imagination.

The current factory was built in 1942 on the site of the Garner homestead. Father Sam Garner and sons, Thad, Ralph, and Harold, incorporated

as TW Garner Foods in 1946. The company now makes Texas Pete's Hotter Hot Sauce and Texas Pete's Garlic Hot Sauce. The complete product line also includes Texas Pete Honey Mustard Sauce, Texas Pete Hot Dog Chili Sauce, Texas Pete Buffalo Style Wing Sauce, and Texas Pete Seafood Cocktail Sauce.

The romantic image of growing and picking peppers and aging them in oak barrels has long been promoted by manufacturers, but today nearly all fermented pepper sauces are made from peppers grown in South and Central America. The mash is shipped to the United States in plastic barrels for finishing. Some producers, like Tabasco, still use wooden barrels, but scientific studies have concluded that plastic barrels are actually superior for several reasons, including sanitation. In the countryside surrounding Lafayette, Louisiana, there are some thirty-five manufacturers of pepper sauce producing around a hundred different brands. Tabasco, Trappey's, Cajun Chef, and Bruce Foods, the makers of Louisiana Hot Sauce are all located there.

Fermented pepper mash has been the standard base for Louisiana-style bottled pepper sauces for nearly 150 years. But fermented pepper sauces aren't unique to Louisiana. Complex pepper sauces like the gochujang of Korea, Matouk's of Trinidad, Pickapeppa from Jamaica, and the hot sweet sauces from Sri Racha, Thailand, are fermented, too. Once you learn how to make a fermented pepper mash, you'll find you can make all kinds of tasty hot pepper sauces at home.

FERMENTED PEPPER SAUCES

Fermenting pepper mash and making homemade Tabasco-style pepper sauce at home seemed like a crazy idea when I started this book. After all, pepper sauce is pretty cheap. Nevertheless, I spent several months experimenting. There were the volcano bottles that spewed red lava all over the kitchen, to the consternation of my family. And there were habanero mashes that could have been used for tear gas.

But eventually, with the help of the community of fermentation fans, I came up with an easy home procedure. And now that my family has gotten accustomed to my homemade pepper sauces, they don't want to use the vinegary commercial stuff anymore. And I have discovered uses for fermented chile paste (including kimchee-style sauerkraut and hot pickles) that I never imagined before I started.

Making pepper sauce at home gives you several advantages over the commercial producers. First of all, there's the vinegar. Since you are going to keep your pepper sauce in the refrigerator rather than sell it to supermarkets, you can use a lot less vinegar than commercial bottlers. This results in a smoother flavor. And while commercial pepper sauce makers use cheap distilled white vinegar, you are free to use any kind you like.

McIlhenny used French wine vinegar for the earliest Tabasco sauce. Rich, sweet vinegars made from sherry and sugar cane were used to make pepper sauces in the early days of the Caribbean sugar plantations (see [Pepper Sherry](#) and [Pepper Vinegar](#)). Rice wine vinegar is a favorite of chefs and Asian hot sauce makers. Seasoned rice wine vinegar, contains sugar, garlic, and other seasonings, produces an amazing Asian flavor.

Experiments with Fermented Pepper Mash

McIlhenny made the first Tabasco sauce by mashing peppers with a potato masher, salting them, and scraping off the mold as they fermented. He mixed the fermented peppers with French wine vinegar and pushed the solids through a series of sieves. Today the big manufacturers still make the mash first and then ferment it later. But as McIlhenny discovered, fermenting a mash is a messy (and moldy) business.

I tried putting my pepper mash in a fermentation crock with a weight on top of it, in a glass bowl with a zippered bag full of water on top, and in a 1-quart mason jar. I found that the weight that was intended to keep the mash under the brine in the fermentation crock sunk into the liquid and allowed the mash to mold. The mold isn't dangerous, but it is a messy and annoying project to scrape it off.

Fermentation veterans who read my blog posts about the project recommended a different strategy. It is much easier to ferment the peppers first and then grind them up into a mash, they suggested. I already knew how to make kosher pickles and fermenting peppers turned out to be very similar. You just make a brine with pickling salt and keep the peppers submerged under the brine.

I also experimented with fermenting garlic, ginger, and other ingredients along with the peppers and grinding them all up together. While the flavors were intriguing, I discovered that pepper mash with other ingredients developed harsh "off" flavors after a few weeks. Pure pepper mash with a splash of vinegar, on the other hand, keeps for six months or more in the refrigerator. You can always add the garlic or other ingredients to small batches of the finished sauces.

With a big jar of pure fermented pepper mash in the fridge, you can add vinegar to make a batch of Louisiana pepper sauce one day and then add a mixture of vinegar with garlic and sugar to make a batch of Sriracha sauce the next day. Or you can use the fiery mash straight out of the container in a soup or stew.



FERMENTED PEPPER MASH

———Makes about 3 cups———

Red jalapeños are excellent for this recipe because they are very fleshy and yield a lot of pepper solids. Fresno peppers work great, too. If you can find enough cayenne or Tabasco peppers, you can ferment them to make an authentic Louisiana-style sauce. You'll notice that I ferment these chiles with their seeds, then remove the seeds later in the process. To make the seed removal easier, make sure you don't mash the peppers too much—you want to leave them in close-to-whole pieces. I find that inserting a cabbage core into the opening of my mason jar is the best way to keep the chiles submerged during fermentation.

2 pounds ripe red chiles

¼ cup pickling salt or fine kosher salt

1 cup spring water

2 tablespoons cane vinegar, sherry vinegar, or rice wine vinegar

Wash the chiles well, then place them outdoors (in the bright sun, if possible) for a day or two. The chiles will ripen in the sun. Bring the chiles inside when they are wrinkled and very soft.

Wearing food handler's gloves, on a cutting board, pull the stems off the peppers and cut them in half lengthwise. Put the cleaned peppers in a

stainless steel mixing bowl and crush them with a potato masher until they are well bruised, but still in large pieces. Sprinkle the peppers evenly with salt and crush some more, but again, make sure to leave the peppers fairly intact. Allow to sit uncovered in the bowl overnight, until liquid forms in the bottom of the bowl.

The next day, carefully transfer the peppers and the liquid to a clean 1-quart mason jar. The peppers should fill the jar with some peppers left over. (Set the extra peppers aside in a separate sealed container.) Pour the water into the mason jar to dissolve any remaining salt and to top off the jar with liquid. (If you don't have spring water, bring your tap water to a boil and allow to sit for a while before using.) Seal the jar loosely with the two-piece canning lid and set it on the counter on top of some paper towels.

After a day or two, the jar will begin to fizz and overflow a little, and the peppers will shrink. Add the reserved peppers to fill the jar. Then cut a chunk of cabbage core to fit the opening of the jar and wedge it into the jar so it holds the chiles under the liquid. Don't worry if a little splashes out. Put the lid back on, but don't screw it on too tightly. Allow the chiles to ferment for at least 1 week and up to 2 weeks, adding water as needed to keep the chiles submerged.

When the chiles have fermented, pour the chiles and brine into a steel bowl. Wearing food handlers' gloves, swish each chile around in the brine until all the seeds fall off, then put the chile in a food processor or blender. When all the chiles have been seeded, pour the brine through a strainer to remove the seeds. Add the brine and the vinegar to the chiles and purée for several minutes into a very smooth liquid mash. Put the mash in a sealed container in the refrigerator. The fermentation will slow down, but don't be alarmed if the mash continues to fizz a little.

Use the mash to make [Homemade Sriracha Sauce](#), [Homemade Pepper Sauce](#), or put it on the table in a jar and use it straight. Because the mash is fermented, it will keep for several months in the refrigerator.

Mash in a Fermentation Crock: Increase the amount of chiles as desired to fit the capacity of your crock and use 2 tablespoons pickling salt per pound. Add spring water to cover the chiles, then put your weights on top and proceed as directed.

Fermented Pepper Mash with Seeds (sambal oelek): Don't remove the seeds from the fermented chiles. Just put the chiles and seeds in a blender with the brine and process them into a paste.

Huy Fong–Style Garlic Chile Paste: Combine 1 cup of the Fermented Pepper Mash with Seeds (sambal oelek) with 1 tablespoon minced garlic, 1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar, 1 teaspoon sugar, and a pinch of salt. Taste and adjust the seasonings as needed. This will last for several months in the refrigerator.

HOMEMADE PEPPER SAUCE

—————Makes about 1 cup—————

Louisiana-style pepper sauces are made with the same basic ingredients—fermented chiles, salt, and vinegar. The salt is already there from the fermenting brine, so all you have to add is vinegar. If you want your sauce to taste just like the commercial stuff, use distilled white vinegar. But if you try rice vinegar, white wine vinegar, or cane vinegar, I am willing to bet you will be amazed by the flavor. You will probably want to make your homemade, private label pepper sauce a little less vinegary than the commercial varieties as well. + The strainer method yields a pepper sauce that is a little thinner than some commercial sauces. To make thicker sauces, like Crystal or Sriracha, use a seedless mash. + You can serve your pepper sauce at the table in any sort of bottle or jar, but to impress your friends and family, I suggest you buy a set of glass vinegar and oil cruets with metal shaker tops and fill them with your hot sauces. You can make several versions and label the bottles with stickers to keep them straight.

½ cup [Fermented Pepper Mash](#)

⅓ to ½ cup cane vinegar, sherry vinegar, rice wine vinegar, seasoned rice wine vinegar, or other vinegar

Combine the mash and the vinegar in a blender and purée together. Pour the mixture through a strainer, pushing against the mesh with a wooden spoon to extract as much pepper flesh as possible. Scrape the bottom of the strainer to get all the pepper solids. Discard the skins and any residue left in the strainer.

Put the sauce in a glass cruet with a metal dispenser top and label it with a date. The finished sauce will keep for several months in the refrigerator.

You can use your fermented pepper mash to make homemade versions of popular pepper sauces, or you can concoct your own proprietary blend. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

Frank's RedHot–Style Pepper Sauce: Purée a half clove of garlic (or more to taste) with ⅓ to ½ cup pepper mash and ½ cup vinegar in a blender.

Texas Pete–Style Pepper Sauce: To make a vinegary pepper sauce like Texas Pete, use ⅔ cup vinegar to ½ cup pepper mash.

Crystal–Style Pepper Sauce: To make a thicker pepper sauce like Crystal, use ⅓ cup vinegar to ½ cup pepper mash.

Asian-Flavored Pepper Sauce: Add ⅓ cup to ½ cup seasoned rice wine vinegar with garlic to ½ cup pepper mash.

Sriracha Sauce: See [recipe](#).



[Homemade Buffalo Chicken Wings](#)

HOMEMADE BUFFALO CHICKEN WINGS

————Serves 6; makes about 30 whole wings————

Legend has it that on a Friday night in 1964, bartender Dominic “The Rooster” Bellissimo at The Anchor Bar Restaurant in Buffalo asked his mom, Teresa Bellissimo, if she could make a snack for him and his friends at closing time. There were a bunch of chicken wings on the counter waiting to be used for the chicken stock. But instead of using the wings for soup, Teresa threw them in the deep-fryer and then covered them with a spicy sauce. She served the wings with celery stalks and blue cheese dressing. + The Anchor Bar’s sauce recipe is a secret, but we know that it included Frank’s RedHot Original Cayenne Pepper Sauce. Margarine was probably the other main ingredient. Frank’s Redhot and many other hot sauce producers now sell wing sauces that are made to be dumped directly on the cooked wings. These are fine, but none taste quite as good as a homemade wing sauce made with butter. + Since I don’t have a deep fryer, my favorite recipe for homemade Buffalo chicken wings calls for baking the wings on a cookie sheet in the oven. In the last step, you crisp the wings under the broiler—but you can also do it on a grill if you are already cooking outside.

5 pounds chicken wings (about 30 whole wings or 60 wing pieces)

1 cup Frank’s RedHot Original Cayenne Pepper Sauce or [Frank’s RedHot–Style Pepper Sauce](#)

½ cup (1 stick) butter, melted

1 cup blue cheese dressing, for serving

12 celery stalks, for serving

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Line two baking sheets with foil and lightly grease with cooking spray.

If desired, leave the wings whole. To split the wings into smaller pieces, first cut off the wing tips and save them for stock. Rinse the wings, split into two parts at the joint and pat dry. Place the wings (or wing pieces) on the pans in a single layer. Bake the wings, uncovered, for 20 minutes, or until cooked through and slightly crispy. Remove from the oven and place in a large mixing bowl.

Combine the hot sauce and melted butter. Set aside ½ cup of the mixture. Pour the rest over the cooked chicken wings. (If your bowl isn’t large enough, mix the wings and sauce in several batches.) The wings can be held at this stage in the refrigerator until you are ready to serve them.

To serve, preheat your broiler on high and broil the wings for 5 minutes on each side, brushing with the reserved sauce. Serve with blue cheese dressing and celery stalks.

KEVIN ROBERTS’S BEER WINGS

————Serves 6; makes about 30 whole wings————

Chef, restaurateur, and BBQ Pitmasters host, Kevin Roberts served as a judge at the Austin Chronicle Hot Sauce Festival in 2012. Roberts is also a spokesman for Frank’s RedHot Pepper Sauce. This is his signature barbecued hot wing recipe. + “The trick to my tasty and healthy wings is I boil them first in beer,” he wrote. “They absorb that great flavor, and it makes them nice and tender. Then you can throw them on the grill and get ’em nice and crispy or bake them if you’re stuck indoors. It’s three easy steps: Boil, Grill, Sauce!”

5 pounds chicken wings (about 30 whole wings or 60 wing pieces)

2 (12-ounce) bottles your favorite beer

½ cup Frank’s RedHot Original Cayenne Pepper Sauce or [Frank’s RedHot–Style Pepper Sauce](#)

½ cup barbecue sauce, such as Cattleman’s or [Trey’s Ancho BBQ Sauce](#)

Prepare a medium hot fire in a grill or preheat the oven to 450°F.

If desired, leave the wings whole. To split the wings into smaller pieces, first cut off the wing tips and save them for stock. Rinse the wings, split into two parts at the joint and pat dry. In a large pot over medium heat, bring the beer to a boil and add the wings (or wing pieces). Cook for 10 minutes, or until tender. Remove the wings and discard the cooking liquid.

Grill the wings or bake until golden brown and crispy, about 5 to 10 minutes per side.

When the wings are cooked, combine the hot sauce and barbecue sauce in a large bowl, add the wings, and toss until the wings are well coated. Serve on a heated plate.

TREY MORAN’S ANCHO BBQ SAUCE

————Makes about 3 cups————

Trey Moran is a food blogger. His site, Texas food done my way, is a favorite source for new recipe ideas. Moran entered this recipe in the Hot Sauce Cookbook Recipe Contest, a competition I publicized on several food blogs. His combination of ancho chiles, ketchup, and rice wine vinegar made an awesome barbecue sauce. The recipe won him a second-place prize.

6 dried ancho chiles, stemmed and seeded

Water

1 cup ketchup

¼ cup rice wine vinegar

2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce

2 tablespoons agave nectar

2 tablespoons Louisiana-style pepper sauce or [Homemade Pepper Sauce](#)

1 tablespoon garlic powder

1 tablespoon paprika

1 tablespoon chili powder

2 teaspoons dry mustard powder

Put the ancho chiles in a medium saucepan and cover with 2 cups of water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer for 12 to 15 minutes, or until very soft. Transfer the chiles and ½ cup of the cooking water to a blender and purée until smooth. Add more liquid, if necessary, to get the blades moving. Discard the rest of the cooking liquid.

Combine the ancho purée with the ketchup, vinegar, Worcestershire sauce, agave nectar, pepper sauce, garlic powder, paprika, chile powder, and mustard powder in the saucepan. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and let simmer for 15 minutes until thick. Use immediately as a barbecue sauce or for [Kevin Roberts’s Beer Wings](#). Store leftover sauce in a covered container in the refrigerator for up to a week.



[Bloody Mary](#)

BLOODY MARY

————Serves 6————

An American bartender named Fernand Petiot is said to have invented the Bloody Mary at the New York Bar in Paris in the 1920s. The original was just vodka and tomato juice. Petiot added the Tabasco sauce and other spices to the recipe after he relocated to the King Cole Bar in New York’s St. Regis Hotel. Tabasco sauce is so closely associated with this tomato juice and vodka cocktail that the McIlhenny Company introduced a Tabasco Bloody Mary Mix in 1976.

1 quart tomato juice

1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lime juice

1 teaspoon Tabasco sauce or [Homemade Pepper Sauce](#)

1 teaspoon prepared horseradish

1 teaspoon celery salt

Ice

6 jiggers vodka, or to taste
6 celery stalks

Combine the tomato juice, Worcestershire sauce, lime juice, Tabasco, and horseradish in a 2-quart pitcher and stir well. Cover the top of the pitcher with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or up to 1 day.

When you are ready to serve the cocktails, put the celery salt on a saucer. Wet the lips of six tall glasses and dip in the celery salt. Fill the glasses with ice. Add a jigger of vodka to each glass. Carefully fill each glass with the tomato juice mixture, stir, and garnish with a stalk of celery.

TEXAS PETE BBQ PORK

————Makes about 3 pounds, enough for 6 to 10 sandwiches————

Boston butts, the bottom part of the pork shoulder, are easy to find at the grocery store. You will also sometimes find the top part of the shoulder, a cut known in the meat-cutting business as a “picnic.” The picnic has a big piece of pig skin still attached and two large bones with the shoulder joint inside. The skin on the picnic keeps the meat very moist, but the large shoulder bones drastically reduce the yield. In other words, you get a lot more meat from a Boston butt than a picnic, but picnic meat is juicier. + Some pitmasters cook picnics instead of Boston butts because they are so much moister. You can also cook one of each and chop the meats together to approximate the texture of a whole pork shoulder. + Serve the minced or shredded meat on a tray with side dishes and sandwich fixin’s or on [BBQ Pork Sandwiches](#).

1 Boston butt or pork picnic, about 8 pounds

1 tablespoon salt, plus more to season

1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, plus more to season

1 teaspoon garlic powder

2 onions, peeled

2 cups [Pepper Vinegar](#)

¼ cup Texas Pete Hot Sauce or [Texas Pete–Style Pepper Sauce](#)

Rinse the meat and set aside. Combine the salt, pepper, and garlic powder and rub it all over the meat. Cover in plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.

Cut the onions in half and put them in the water pan of your smoker. (If your smoker didn’t come with a water pan, use a fireproof steel bowl.) Add water to fill the pan.

Remove the pork from the refrigerator an hour before cooking to allow it come to room temperature. Set up your smoker for indirect heat with a water pan. Use hardwood lump charcoal or charcoal briquettes. Maintain a temperature between between 225°F and 275°F. If you are cooking a picnic, place the meat in the smoker skin-side down. The skin will shrink and harden, serving as a vessel to contain the fat and juice. Keep it skin-side down throughout the cooking time.

Replenish the charcoal and the water in the water pan as needed. Mop the meat with the Pepper Vinegar whenever you open the lid. Expect a cooking time of an hour a pound, or 8 hours—more if you raise the lid often or if the fire goes out. For chopped pork, you need to reach an internal temperature of 190°F. For pulled pork, an internal temperature of 200°F is best.

When the meat is done, allow it to rest for at least 15 minutes. Then remove the skin and bones. For chopped pork, put the meat and fat on a chopping block and mince with a pair of meat cleavers. For pulled pork, pull the meat away from the bone and shred it into little pieces, massaging the big chunks of fat into the shredded meat. Chop any pieces that don’t come apart easily. Season the meat with salt and pepper and Texas Pete to taste.



[BBQ Pork Sandwiches](#)

BBQ PORK SANDWICHES

————Makes 4 (¼-pound) sandwiches or 3 (⅓-pound) sandwiches————

A perfect barbecue sandwich is a delicate balance between yin and yang. It is not too dry and not too squishy. The aggressively peppery, vinegar sauce must be balanced by the right amount of palate-calming creamy coleslaw, and the red and white juices of the two should drip in harmony onto the plate. And, of course, the barbecue itself must drip fat and smell like smoke. + Size is a matter of appetite. Most barbecue joints serve their chopped pork sandwiches on a hamburger bun. Since hamburger buns range in size from 3½ to 5 inches in diameter, the amount of meat varies—and so, therefore, does the amount of sauce and slaw. Figure ¼ pound of meat for a small bun and ⅓ pound for a large bun. The volume of slaw should equal about half the volume of meat.

For the slaw

3 cups chopped green cabbage

½ cup mayonnaise

2 tablespoons white vinegar

1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

For the sandwiches

3 to 4 hamburger buns

2 tablespoons butter, softened

1 pound [Texas Pete BBQ Pork](#)

Texas Pete Hot Sauce, [Texas Pete–Style Pepper Sauce](#), or [Trey Moran’s Ancho BBQ Sauce](#)

To make the slaw, combine the cabbage, mayonnaise, vinegar, sugar, salt, and pepper in a food processor and pulse eight or ten times until the cabbage is the size of confetti. Refrigerate for an hour or so before serving to meld the flavors.

To make the sandwiches, toast and butter the buns. Mix the pork with desired sauce until moist and divide the meat among the bottom hamburger buns. Top each with slaw and the crown bun. Serve the sauce and remaining slaw on the side.



[Backyard Oyster Bar](#)

BACKYARD OYSTER BAR

————Serves 15 as a starter————

Since their invention, Louisiana pepper sauces have always been served with raw oysters on the half shell in Gulf Coast oyster bars. Oysters and pepper sauce were so closely linked that an illustration in magazine ads for Tabasco Sauce in the early 1900s depicted a bottle of the pepper sauce inside an oyster shell. “A most delightful seasoning for oysters, soups, fish, game, etc., etc.” read the copy. + It’s easy to set up an oyster bar in your backyard. You will need one small galvanized washtub, one soup pot, three ten-pound bags of regular ice and one ten-pound bag of shaved ice. The shaved ice isn’t absolutely necessary, but it sure looks good. Your local grocery store probably uses shaved ice in their seafood display. Ask them in advance to set some aside for the appointed day. + Oysters taste great outdoors in cool weather. Put some lemon wedges and Tabasco sauce on ice with the oysters. Set the table with crackers or rye bread and butter. Serve the oysters with cold beer, or gin martinis.

100 oysters, fresh and unshucked

6 lemons, cut into wedges

1 bottle Tabasco sauce or [Homemade Pepper Sauce](#)

Rye bread, for serving (optional)

Cultured butter, for serving (optional)

Saltines, for serving (optional)

Wash out the tub and drain it. Turn the soup pot upside down in the bottom of the galvanized tub to cut down on the amount of ice required and the overall weight. Set the tub up so the top is at counter surface height so that you can display the oysters where people can see them. Dump the big ice cubes in to fill the tub at least half way up and cover the top with a layer of finely crushed ice. Shuck as people eat the oysters so they are always freshly opened—don’t try to shuck too far in advance.

To serve the oysters, set out the lemon wedges and pepper sauce, along with accompaniments such as rye bread with cultured butter or a sleeve of saltines, if desired. Provide oyster plates and cocktail forks if you have them, or make do with paper plates and toothpicks. Don’t forget to provide a place to dump the shells. Beyond that, you can make your oyster party as casual or elegant as you like.



INTERNATIONAL PEPPER SAUCES

To be considered a local in the café scene in Chiang Mai, Thailand, you have to eat the fiery jungle curry without wincing, whining, or panting like a dog. In Bangladesh, you are considered a wimp if you can't handle the bhut jolokia hot sauce. The starring role of chiles in Asian cuisine is odd when you consider that capsicum pods aren't native there. Chile peppers didn't grow in Asia or Africa until the Spanish and Portuguese began spreading them after the first voyage of Columbus.

But don't try telling the fiery food-loving locals in Southeast Asia or Africa that their chiles are actually American. Over the four centuries since their introduction, the chiles have hybridized into unique forms. African piri-piri peppers, Thai chiles, and other localized pod types inspire intense loyalty among those who eat them.

The strange relationship between humankind and peppers got started thousands of years ago. It's easy to imagine a native American cave dweller taking his first bite of a chile pepper, but it's hard to understand why he would take a second. The most popular theory for why humans started eating peppers is that highly seasoned food causes "gustatory sweating." Early humans ate peppers because they cooled them off in hot weather by increasing perspiration, particularly of the scalp.

Gustatory sweating might still be part of the reason that chile peppers and hot sauces are beloved in hot climates—that and the fact that pepper plants flourish in the tropics and subtropics with very little effort and are therefore relatively inexpensive. But why do people who have air conditioners eat hot peppers? And what about the increased popularity of hot sauces in the northern part of the United States, Canada, and Great Britain?

Exactly why modern people who live in air-conditioned houses crave foods that are painful to eat has long been a mystery. Psychologists have developed several theories. One holds that eating ever hotter hot sauces is a thrill-seeking behavior akin to riding roller coasters or going to see horror movies. The body reacts to the perceived danger by producing a rush of endorphins, a powerful painkiller, which induces a natural high. And the rush of endorphins is habit-forming.

Another explanation is that eating chile peppers is tied to changes in our culture. Humankind's traditional food neophobia (fear of new foods) kept us from getting poisoned for most of our evolutionary history. But scholarly studies suggest that in modern urban areas, our ancient food neophobia is being replaced by a new food neophilia (love of new foods).

As people are exposed to other cultures—through travel, trade, or television—their willingness to try foreign foods increases. The fast-food hamburger may be the most familiar symbol of globalization, but globalization has also made the United States, a country where eating raw fish was once considered ridiculous, one of the world's largest consumers of sushi. And when it comes to chiles, the globalization that started some four hundred years ago in America is coming back around.

Twenty years ago, the popularity of Mexican food got Americans eating more chile peppers and picante sauces. The chips and salsa proved to be a gateway drug that led to the extremely hot foods served in Asian restaurants. The innocent inquiry "Mild, medium, hot, or Thai hot?" made us all realize that there are levels of spiciness we had never even considered before.

In the 1970s, changes in immigration quotas led to the rapid growth of Asian, Southeast Asian, and African communities in the United States. And, in 1975, the fall of Saigon brought a large influx of Vietnamese immigrants to California and the Gulf Coast. Slowly, over several decades, beef noodle pho, banh mi sandwiches, and summer rolls with dipping sauces have made their way into the culinary mainstream in California and the Gulf states. Meanwhile, Vietnamese immigrants have embraced Louisiana crawfish, jalapeño chiles, and American beef.

When I asked Thuy Tran, a second generation Vietnamese-American, to teach me to make nuoc mam cham, she gave me a tour of her restaurant, b-10 Vietnamese Café in Houston, Texas. Her mother's restaurant in Houston's Chinatown was named Givral, an homage to a famous café in Saigon. Tran named her restaurant after item number b-10, a barbecued pork banh mi, which was the most popular item on the menu at Givral.

Tran also introduced computerized cash registers, eye-catching graphics, and some innovative items like "The Sloppy" banh mi sandwich, a Vietnamese take on a sloppy joe made with curry instead of barbecue sauce. She also serves bo luc lac, the classic Vietnamese steak dish, on a Tex-Mex style sizzling comal. You can also get your lemongrass-marinated filet mignon with two fried eggs for breakfast, a dish she calls "Vietnamese Steak and Eggs."

As our society becomes increasingly multicultural, we are being exposed to new and foreign foods at an unprecedented level. And we are adopting those new cuisines into our everyday life without even thinking much about it. If you have a bottle of Sriracha sauce, Indian curry paste, or sambal oelek on your refrigerator door shelf, you know exactly what I am talking about.

The scholarly study of food neophobia and food neophilia in North America and Western Europe has been going on for a long time and is far more complex than the broad strokes painted here. Sociologists are interested in the subject because food neophilia is a predictor for other cultural behaviors and attitudes that have consequences for our societies far beyond the sales of hot sauce and the success rate of Asian restaurants. But "world food" lovers have their own reasons to be interested in the subject.

I think it was around 2007 when a sambal won the special variety category of the Austin Hot Sauce Festival contest for the first time. Since then we have sampled curries, chutneys, and chile pastes of many ethnicities. There is a staggering array of hot pepper sauces made in Asia. The hot ketchup-like sauces of Sri Racha in Thailand are easy for Americans to love, while Malayasian sauces made with fermented shrimp paste induce a grimace among the hot sauce contest judges. Making Asian hot sauces that appeal to American tastes is now a major industry.

Here's a collection of international hot sauce recipes adapted for American kitchens using easily available ingredients.

SPICY PEANUT SAUCE

————Makes about 3 cups————

The recipe for this sauce comes from b-10 Vietnamese Café in Houston where it is a favorite with summer rolls. It is very similar to the Indonesian and Thai peanut sauces that are famously served with street food dishes like beef and chicken satay.

1 cup water

1 cup hoisin sauce

½ cup smooth peanut butter

¼ cup sugar

[Fermented Pepper Mash](#) or sambal oelek ([homemade](#) or store-bought)

Combine the water, hoisin sauce, peanut butter, sugar, and chile mash in a saucepan over low heat and cook, stirring to dissolve the sugar and combine the flavors, for about 5 minutes.

Allow to cool and store in the refrigerator. Bring to room temperature before serving. This will keep for up to a week in the refrigerator.

NUOC MAM CHAM

(Vietnamese Dipping Sauce)

————Makes about 3 cups————

At b-10 Vietnamese Café, this dipping sauce base is stored in the refrigerator. To make a bowl of dipping sauce, the chiles, herbs, and garnishes are added just before the sauce is served. Thuy Tran makes the sauce with vinegar at the restaurant, but at home she often uses lime juice instead. You can also use a blend of both.

Base

2 cups water

¼ cup sugar

⅓ cup freshly squeezed lime juice or rice wine vinegar

⅓ cup fish sauce, such as Squid brand

Chiles

2 to 3 fresh Thai chiles, thinly sliced, or 1 tablespoon [Fermented Pepper Mash](#) or sambal oelek ([homemade](#) or store-bought), or to taste

Optional Additions

1 clove garlic, shaved into slivers

1 teaspoon chopped fresh cilantro

1 teaspoon chopped fresh mint

1 teaspoon chopped roasted peanuts

1 teaspoon julienned carrots

To make the base, heat the water and sugar together until the sugar dissolves. Take off the heat and allow to cool. Add the lime juice and fish sauce. Store this base in the refrigerator for up to a month.

To serve, pour ½ cup of the base into a bowl and mix in chiles, along with the garlic, cilantro, mint, peanuts, and carrots, if desired. Always discard the leftover sauce in the bowl.



[Goi Cuon](#)

GOI CUON

(Vietnamese Summer Rolls)

————Makes 8 rolls————

You can make these easy rice paper rolls with shrimp, chicken, pork, or just vegetables. In my favorite version, sizzling strips of pork right out of

the pan are wrapped up with cold vegetables and shrimp for a stunning combination of hot and cold. Leftover pork chops are perfect for the “twice-cooked” pork. I like to serve these with both the [Spicy Peanut Sauce](#) and [Nuoc Mam Cham](#).

8 ounces rice vermicelli noodles

16 pencil-thin strips cooked pork

½ teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

½ teaspoon garlic powder

1 teaspoon peanut oil

8 sheets rice paper, preferably 8 inches in diameter

16 medium to large shrimp, cooked, peeled, and halved lengthwise

¼ cup shredded carrot

4 romaine lettuce leaves, torn in half lengthwise, stem discarded

16 cucumber spears, seeds removed

2 scallions, trimmed and cut into lengthwise slivers

2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint leaves

2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves

32 basil leaves

2 tablespoons chopped salted peanuts

[Spicy Peanut Sauce](#), to serve

[Nuoc Mam Cham](#), to serve

Cook the noodles according to the directions on the package. Allow to cool.

When all the other ingredients are ready, arrange them on the counter or work area. Lay out a clean kitchen towel. Put hot water (120°F) in a bowl next to a towel.

Toss the pork with salt, pepper, and garlic powder. Heat the oil in a skillet and cook the pork strips until sizzling, turning a few times, about 2 minutes.

Soften a sheet of rice paper in the water for 10 seconds and lay it on the towel while it is still rigid. It will continue to soften as you work with it. In the middle of the rice paper, lay 4 shrimp pieces and about an eighth of the carrot, lettuce, cucumber, scallions, mint, and cilantro leaves. Top with 4 basil leaves and 2 strips of hot pork; sprinkle with chopped peanuts and roll up the rice paper, keeping it fairly tight. You can roll in the ends burrito-style, if you have large sheets of rice paper, or just roll it up and allow the ingredients to protrude from the ends of the roll, if you are working with smaller sheets.

Repeat this process until all the ingredients are used up. Serve immediately while the pork is hot, with the [Spicy Peanut Sauce](#) and [Nuoc Mam Cham](#) as dipping sauces.

HOMEMADE SRIRACHA SAUCE

————Makes about 1 cup————

The famous Huy Fong Rooster Brand Sriracha Sauce is made in California from red jalapeños. It is named after the hot sauces of the Thai coastal town of Sri Racha. The Thai Sri Racha sauces are thinner and runnier than the American version, which is very close to the consistency of ketchup. You can make your own Sriracha sauce with fresh chiles, if you like, but it doesn't last very long in the refrigerator. Most people agree the fermented version tastes much better; it also lasts a lot longer. + If you have some [fermented pepper mash](#) on hand, it's easy to make your own homemade fermented Sriracha sauce. And since you don't need as much vinegar, you will probably like the homemade version better than the stuff in the bottle.

2 tablespoon granulated sugar

1 tablespoon dark brown sugar

4 tablespoons rice wine vinegar

1 cup puréed fresh red chiles or [Fermented Pepper Mash](#)

2 garlic cloves

Combine the sugars with the vinegar in a small saucepan and heat until the sugars dissolve. Allow the vinegar mixture to cool. Combine the vinegar mixture with the mash and garlic and purée in a blender until very smooth. Strain to remove any grit or large particles. Store the sauce in a squeeze bottle in the refrigerator for up to 3 weeks if made with fresh chiles, or for up to 6 months if made with fermented chiles.



[Sajoer Boontje](#)

SAMBAL

————Makes 3½ cups————

Sambal is the term used to describe a simple pepper paste that is used as a substitute for fresh chiles in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. It is also the name used to describe commercial pepper pastes, such as sambal oelek. These highly concentrated pastes are very hot. They are often used as table condiments, in cooking, and as a base for the more elaborate sauces of Indonesia and Malaysia that are also known as sambals. + There are some three hundred varieties of sambal in Indonesia alone. Sambal kecap manis is a sweet soy sauce with tomato, shallots, and lime that has become popular among American chefs. Sambal dabu dabu is a mild chile sauce that tastes like a Mexican salsa. Sambal asam is a tart tamarind-flavored sauce. Sambal balado is made with shallots, garlic, tomato, and lime juice. Sambal terasi is made with the highly aromatic fermented shrimp paste called terais in Indonesia and belacan in Mayalasia. + Since Indonesia was a Dutch colony, sambals are also found in the Dutch-Indonesian restaurants of Holland and throughout Dutch culinary culture. You'll find recipes for the more complex Indonesian and Malaysian sambals in the excellent cookbook, *Cradle of Flavor*, by James Oseland. Here's a sweet and spicy sambal that's easy to make in an American home kitchen. Serve with [Telor Belado](#), [Eggplant Sambal](#), or [Sajoer Boontje](#) (pictured [here](#)).

2½ cups chopped shallots (about 8 shallots)
4 large garlic cloves, chopped
4 lemongrass stalks (trimmed with tough outer leaves removed), thinly sliced
2 tablespoons tamarind pulp
2 tablespoons minced peeled galangal (substitute ginger, if necessary)
¾ cup light brown sugar
1 tablespoon salt
10 fresh Red Thai chiles (or substitute cayenne chiles), stemmed
3 large red serrano chiles, stemmed and minced
1 cup chopped tomatoes
¼ cup vegetable oil
Juice of 3 limes

Combine all the ingredients in a mortar and grind into a fine paste. Or use a blender or food processor to purée all ingredients into a paste. Pour the ground mixture into a saucepan and cook very slowly over low heat until a little oil rises to the surface, about 10 minutes. Store in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

Eggplant Sambal: Heat 1 tablespoon vegetable oil in a wok or skillet and stir-fry 4 cups of unpeeled eggplant cubes over high heat until browned, about 3 minutes. Add a few teaspoons of soy sauce and rice wine vinegar, cover, and cook for a few more minutes over low heat, just until tender. Add 1 cup sambal, toss to coat, and serve over rice.

Telor Belado: Peel four hard-boiled eggs. Fry in small skillet filled with ½ inch of hot oil over high heat, turning once or twice, until a skin develops, about three to five minutes. Serve the eggs in a bowl with ½ cup sambal poured over top. Or substitute a dozen quail eggs for the chicken eggs and serve as a shared appetizer.

Sajoer Boontje: Heat 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil in a wok or skillet over high heat and stir-fry 1 onion, chopped. When the onion is translucent, about 3 minutes, add 1 pound green beans, trimmed and cut into 2-inch lengths. Cook until the beans are a bright green, about 3 minutes. Add 1 cup sambal and ½ cup coconut milk. Cook for another few minutes, tossing to coat the beans with the sambal.

GREEN CURRY PASTE

————Makes 1 cup————

Thailand absorbed much of its early culinary culture from Indonesia, but Indian culture and cuisine have also had a particularly strong influence since the arrival of Buddhism in the third century. Thai curries were inspired by Indian curries, but they were made with coconut milk instead of ghee and yogurt since Thailand lacked dairy products. Fresh herbs were also much more prevalent in Thai curries, especially in green ones like this. + Use this spicy curry paste to make [Green Curry Shrimp](#) or [Raj Dixit's Green Curry Chow-Chow](#).

1 teaspoon cumin seeds, toasted and ground
1 teaspoon coriander seeds, toasted and ground
1 teaspoon white peppercorns, toasted and ground
1 clove garlic
3 shallots
1 bunch scallions, trimmed
3 stalks lemongrass (trimmed with tough outer leaves removed), minced
1 tablespoon minced, peeled galangal
10 kaffir lime leaves
Stems from 1 bunch cilantro
20 fresh green Thai chiles (or substitute 5 serranos), or to taste

Grind all the ingredients in a mortar into a fine paste, or purée at high speed in a blender, adding a little water to get the blades moving. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

GREEN CURRY SHRIMP

————Makes 6 servings————

Thai curries are soupier than Indian curries and generally the fresh chiles make them a lot hotter. The bright flavors of the herbs and green chiles are a natural combination with fresh seafood. I like to make this curry extremely spicy—the heat slows me down so I savor every bite.

2 tablespoons peanut oil
¼ cup [Green Curry Paste](#), or to taste
6 green Thai chiles, or to taste
2 cups diced eggplant (1-inch dice)
4 kaffir lime leaves
3 stalks lemongrass (trimmed with tough outer leaves removed), very thinly sliced
1½ cups coconut milk
1 pound fresh large shrimp, peeled and deveined
2 tablespoons Asian fish sauce, such as Squid brand
36 fresh basil leaves
Hot steamed rice

Heat the oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat and add the curry paste, stirring until the curry is dissolved and bubbly. Add the chiles, eggplant, kaffir lime leaves, lemongrass, and coconut milk and stir. Cook until the eggplant is soft, 4 minutes. Add the shrimp and cook until they just begin to curl, 3 to 5 minutes, depending on the size. Mix in the fish sauce.

To serve, divide the curry among six bowls, garnish each with 6 fresh basil leaves, and serve with steamed rice on the side.

BERBERE

————Makes about ½ cup powder or 2 cups paste————

Award-winning chef Marcus Samuelsson was born in Ethiopia and now operates Red Rooster restaurant in Harlem. His cooking has put berbere, Ethiopia's complex pepper and spice mix, in the spotlight. + Ethiopians always keep some of the powdered version on hand so they can whip up berbere paste whenever they want. Berbere paste is made by sautéing the powder with onions, garlic, paprika, and liquids. Grind your own spices [as described](#).

Berbere Powder

1 tablespoon cayenne pepper
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 teaspoon ground ginger
½ teaspoon ground cardamom
½ teaspoon ground coriander
½ teaspoon fenugreek
¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
⅛ teaspoon ground cloves
⅛ teaspoon ground cinnamon
⅛ teaspoon ground allspice
20 dried crushed chile pequín pods, 10 dried crushed chiles de árbol, or ¼ cup New Mexican chile powder

Berbere Paste

1 tablespoon vegetable oil
2 tablespoons finely chopped onion
1 tablespoon finely chopped garlic
3 tablespoons dry red wine
1 cup paprika
Berbere Powder
1½ cups water

To make the powder, combine all the powder ingredients and store in a sealed canister in a cool, dry place for up to several months.

To make the paste, heat the oil in a saucepan over medium heat and cook the onion until wilted, about 3 minutes. Add the garlic and continue to

cook until soft, 1 minute. Add the wine, paprika, and about ½ cup berbere powder. Add the water and stir until well combined. Cool the mixture, transfer to a blender, and purée into a smooth paste. Use as a condiment or to make Ethiopian wat dishes.



[Doro Wat](#)

DORO WAT

————Serves 4————

Known as the Ethiopian national dish, doro wat is the most popular traditional food in that country. It is often eaten from a communal bowl with each diner using injera bread to scoop out a portion.

¼ cup lemon juice

2 teaspoons salt, plus more as needed

4 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs (about 2 pounds)

3 cups chopped onions

3 garlic cloves, minced

1 tablespoon peeled, minced fresh ginger (½-inch piece)

Water (optional)

¼ cup butter

2 tablespoons paprika

1 cup [berbere paste](#)

¾ cup chicken stock

¼ cup red wine

1 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste

Freshly ground black pepper

4 hard-boiled eggs, peeled

Injera bread or hot cooked rice, to serve

Combine the lemon juice and salt in a large, nonreactive mixing bowl and stir until slightly dissolved. Add the chicken thighs, one at a time, dipping both sides of each piece in the marinade to coat. Cover and allow to marinate in the refrigerator for about 30 minutes.

While the chicken is marinating, purée the onions, garlic, and ginger in a food processor or blender. Add a little water, if necessary, to get the blades moving.

Heat the butter in a Dutch oven over medium heat and stir in the paprika to color the oil. Stir in the berbere paste and cook for 3 minutes, until heated through. Add the onion mixture and sauté until most of the moisture evaporates and the mixture reduces, about 15 minutes.

Pour in the stock and wine, add cayenne to taste, and season with salt and pepper. Remove the chicken from the lemon juice and discard the marinade. Add the chicken to the pot and cover with sauce. Bring the sauce to a boil, reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 45 minutes, flipping the chicken halfway through. Add water, if necessary, to maintain the liquid level.

Add the whole hard-boiled eggs and continue to cook until the chicken is very tender, 10 to 15 minutes. Adjust seasoning and serve hot with injera bread or rice.

Sik Sik Wat: Substitute cubes of beef stew meat for the chicken and cook until tender, which can take up to 45 minutes.

Zucchini Wat: Omit the chicken. Cut 2 pounds of zucchini or summer squash into cubes and cook until tender, about 10 minutes.

Grinding Spices

When making berbere, curry powder, or other dry spice mixes, grind your own spices. The flavor will be fresher and more intense. I prefer to toast cumin seeds, coriander seeds, fenugreek seeds, cardamom pods, and peppercorns separately in a hot, dry skillet until fragrant, as some spices take longer than others. After they cool, use a either a mortar and pestle or a propeller grinder, like the kind you use for coffee, to powder the toasted spices. (If you use the same grinder for coffee and spices, clean it out by grinding a little cornmeal before switching uses.)

PIRI-PIRI SAUCE

—————Makes 2 small portions—————

Peppers were introduced to the Portuguese colonies of Africa shortly after the first voyage of Columbus. They quickly began to thrive in the wild and were spread across Africa by birds. Piri-piri, peri-peri, and pili-pili are various written versions of a Swahili term that literally means “pepper pepper.” These are all names for the chile known as the African bird’s eye pepper in English. The small pointed chile is a cultivar of *Capsicum frutescens*, the same species as Tabasco peppers. It grows in Malawi, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. It is also found growing wild in the jungles of Sudan. Piri-piri sauce is an important part of Portuguese cooking and the hybrid African-Portuguese cuisines of Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa. + Portugalla restaurant in Houston makes their piri-piri sauce fresh to order, and serves it in a Chinese soup spoon for presentation. They use red or yellow Thai peppers instead of African bird peppers, but red chile pequins work well, too.

Serve the sauce with African dishes or as a condiment for grilled chicken.

¼ cup red bird’s eye chiles, chile pequins, or fresh red Thai chiles

1 teaspoon freshly squeezed lemon juice

½ teaspoon minced garlic

½ teaspoon minced fresh peeled ginger

Pinch of salt

1 tablespoon olive oil

Remove the stems and mince the chiles. Combine with the lemon juice, garlic, ginger, salt, and oil in a mixing bowl. Use immediately.

HOT AJVAR

—————Makes 1½ cups—————

It’s easy to forget that until World War I, the Ottoman Empire stretched from Indonesia to the former Yugoslavian republics. Eastern Europe acquired its own hot and spicy food traditions under the rule of the Turkish sultans. Eggplant dips and spreads are common Turkish appetizers, typically served with pita bread. + In the Balkan countries, a variation of these eggplant spreads, called ajvar, has become a culinary icon. Ajvar is typically made once a year, after the autumn harvest in a canning marathon that produces the zimnica (winter foods). Jams, jellies, pickles, pickled chile peppers, pickled tomatoes, and countless other preserves are made. But for many, ajvar is the most important canned item of all. + Ajvar is a popular condiment with the spicy Balkan hamburgers called pljeskavica and the kebab-shaped cevapcici. But ajvar is also eaten thickly spread on buttered bread as an appetizer. + In Macedonia and Northern Croatia, the ajvar is fiery hot. Since we don’t have the long, spicy Hungarian paprika peppers in Houston, my Balkan-Texan friends mix roasted red bell peppers with jalapeños to make hot ajvar at home. + I made my first batch on a charcoal grill and was proud of its smoky flavor. But one of my Bosnian friends had a suggestion to improve the recipe. After the eggplant and peppers are roasted on the grill and the skins and seeds are removed, she said her mom simmered the vegetables with the garlic and olive oil on the stove for a while. The extra step was worth it, and the silky texture that results from slow cooking in oil is amazing. + Serve as an appetizer with home-baked bread or on fresh pita with feta. Or use as condiment with grilled chicken or Balkan burgers.

6 red bell peppers

3 to 5 jalapeños

2 eggplants (about 1 pound each)

3 large garlic cloves, chopped

½ cup olive oil

2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Parsley sprigs, for garnish

Prepare a hot fire in a grill or preheat the oven to 475°F.

Place the bell peppers, jalapeños, and eggplants on the grill and cover, or place on a baking sheet in the oven. Cook, turning occasionally, until well charred, 20 to 30 minutes. Place the vegetables in a paper bag, or put them in a bowl and cover with plastic wrap, and let them steam for at least 10 minutes or up to 1 hour. Peel off and discard the burnt skin along with the stems and seeds.

Coarsely chop the vegetables and put them in a pan with the garlic and olive oil. Simmer over very low heat, stirring often to avoid burning, until the garlic is soft, about 15 minutes. Remove the vegetables from the oil and allow to cool, reserving the oil.

When the vegetables are cooled, put them in a food processor with the lemon juice. Pulse five or six times until just combined. For a chunky ajvar, add the reserved olive oil and pulse a few more times. For a creamy ajvar, slowly drizzle the cooled olive oil from the pan into the processor with the blades turning, until the mixture forms a smooth emulsion. Add salt and pepper to taste.

To serve, transfer to a bowl and garnish with parsley. Store in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

Green Ajvar: Substitute 8 poblano peppers or 10 [roasted green chiles](#) for the red bell peppers.



Clockwise, from left: [Green Curry Chow-Chow](#), [Red-Eye Mayo](#), [Tomato-Coriander Berbere](#), [Pineapple Pique](#), and [Habanero Cranberry Sauce](#)

CHILEHEAD CHEFS' HOT SAUCES

Most of the chefs I know love hot and spicy food. After work, they go out for a late night snack and order pad thai superhot or taco truck gorditas drenched in chile de árbol salsa. But once they don their whites, the hot flavors get hung up with the street clothes. Why are chile peppers looked down on by classically trained chefs? Is it because the French dominate our culinary training academies and they have “delicate” palates?

Hot and spicy flavors are relegated to the ghetto called “ethnic food.” But lately the line between fine dining and ethnic restaurants has been blurred by pioneering chefs. At his wildly successful Momofuku restaurants, Korean-American David Chang uses chiles without apology, while at Zak Pelaccio’s Fatty Crab and Fatty Cue, hot and spicy is part of the appeal.

In Houston, Bryan Caswell at Reef puts Sriracha remoulade on fried catfish banh mi sandwiches and Chris Shepherd at Underbelly serves a ballsy blend of Southern, Asian, and Latino dishes organized around local ingredients. His dish of braised rabbit in Korean gochujang with chewy rice dumplings is spectacular. The duck tamale and fried duck egg with red sauce and pico de gallo that Tim Byres serves at Smoke in Dallas is spicy, too.

But in the hippest, Ferran Adrià–inspired, “food as art” fine dining restaurants, you find foams, powders, capsules, and liquid-nitrogen frozen bon-bons, and no fiery thrills. For people with a serious chile habit, this can be real problem. It’s a little shameful to follow a stellar fine dining experience with a crude pepper fix, but that’s exactly what happened when Francis Lam and I found ourselves sucking down hot sauce–laced tacos after midnight at a Mission Street burrito joint after eating our way through a wonderful twelve-course tasting menu down the street at Commonwealth. (We were in San Francisco for a taco truck conference, after all.)

The first time I ever saw these two world views collide was at The Inn at Dos Brisas, a luxury dude ranch near Washington, Texas. The Inn is a member of the exclusive Relais & Chateau group, a portfolio of properties that includes a lot of European castles and Caribbean islands where very rich people relax. I was there writing a story about the gardening operation and the rare heirloom tomatoes. At the time, the kitchen was under the direction of superstar chef Raj Dixit.

Dixit works with the international restaurant group run by the Egyptian-born chef Michael Mina these days. But when I met him, he was supervising twenty-four acres of amazing organic gardens. While we rode around in a golf cart, checking out the exotic plants, Dixit told me his father was Indian and his mother was Filipino and that he grew up eating spicy food in California and New Jersey.

Dixit graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park in 1998 and worked with farm-to-table pioneer Craig Shelton at Ryland Inn in New Jersey for nearly a decade. In New York, Dixit served as chef de cuisine for Dennis Foy and later for David Bouley. In 2009, he received a scholarship and traveled to Japan where he studied cooking in Sakai City. He was, in short, a big deal for such a young chef.

Seated in the bar at the inn, sipping Veuve Clicquot, my wife, Rose, and I chatted with the chef about dinner. He asked us if we had any dietary restrictions. And then he made a fateful mistake: he asked us if we had any special preferences. His face contorted slightly when I told him we liked extremely spicy food and that I was writing a book about hot sauce. He had an eight-course tasting menu already planned for the evening; it included lots of heirloom tomatoes, but no heirloom peppers.

“But you have all those chiles growing out there,” I pointed out. Finally, he capitulated.

“Okay, I can give you something hot on the side,” Chef Dixit conceded.

Seated at the table, we were pleasantly surprised when the first course, a gorgeous composition of several kinds of heirloom tomatoes with tiny cubes of sushi tuna, several basil, and a dusting of Parmigiano Reggiano Vacche Rosse, was served with a trio of bowls on the side. In the bowls were two Japanese chile powder blends and a bright red chile-infused sesame oil. I nursed the condiments with the intention of keeping them around for the whole meal. But I didn’t need to worry.

Each course came with a freshly made hot sauce that was designed to accentuate the flavors of the dish. There was a pineapple pique and [dried chile dipping sauce](#) to go with the langoustine, coconut tofu, borage flowers, and three preparations of cucumbers; a [green curry chow-chow](#) to go with the porcelet with plums and mushrooms; and a Ethiopian [coriander-tomato berbere](#) beside the saddle of lamb served with chickpeas, green olives, and artichokes.

A tasting menu with a flight of accompanying hot sauces—it was all my fondest food dreams come true. I asked the sommelier to steer us toward some wines that resonated with the chile peppers. He responded with some inspired picks, included a Collio Pinot Grigio with the seafood and a Sonoma Pinot Noir with the lamb.

The concept of these upscale hot sauces is to start with concentrated chile bases and combine them with flavors that complement the dish. Dixit married Thai green curry with Southern chow-chow and Ethiopian bebere with Indian tomato-coriander sauce. It’s an enlightened way to make hot sauces that are used all over the world, from Indonesia to Africa, to the Caribbean, and it is becoming more common in American restaurant kitchens.

Dixit kindly agreed to provide me with the recipes for several of the inspired hot and spicy condiments he created for us at Inn at Dos Brisas.

Other recipes in this chapter come from the great chefs who have served as judges at the Austin Chronicle Hot Sauce Festival, as well as several other fire-eating chefs who have agreed to help us out. So here’s a collection of hot recipes designed for fine dining. Enjoy!

RAJ DIXIT’S TOMATO-CORIANDER BERBERE

————Makes 2¼ cups————

Raj Dixit served this pleasantly spicy table condiment with saddle of lamb with chickpeas and olives. It goes well with grilled or broiled lamb or chicken.

1 tablespoon olive oil
1 onion, chopped
Cloves from 1 head garlic, chopped (about ½ cup)
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1½ cups white wine
¼ cup coriander seeds
2 large beefsteak tomatoes, chopped
1 cup tomato juice
2 stalks lemongrass (trimmed with tough outer leaves removed), chopped
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon fresh lemon thyme
1 teaspoon grated orange zest
2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
¼ cup [Berbere Paste](#)

Heat the olive oil in a sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the onion and cook until wilted, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the garlic and stir for a few minutes, or until lightly cooked. Add the tomato paste and white wine, and cook until almost all the liquid is reduced, about 20 minutes. Meanwhile, toast the coriander seeds in a dry skillet over medium heat for about 5 minutes, or until the seeds are fragrant. Use a glass cup, jar, or second skillet to crush the toasted seeds.

Add the coriander seeds, tomatoes, tomato juice, and lemongrass to the sauce. Season with salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer, and continue cooking for 15 minutes.

Remove from the heat and add the lemon thyme and orange zest. While warm, pass the sauce through a food mill or a mesh sieve. To the strained mash, add the lemon juice and berbere paste to taste, stirring vigorously until it is dissolved and well combined. Serve at room temperature.



[Raj Dixit's Green Curry Chow-Chow](#)

RAJ DIXIT'S GREEN CURRY CHOW-CHOW

————Makes about 6 pints————

A sweet-and-sour combination of cabbage, onions, and whatever else was left in the garden at canning time, chow-chow was once very popular across the American South. Some say chow-chow was a Chinese relish introduced by railroad workers. Other claim that the name comes from chou, the French word for cabbage, and that it came to western Louisiana from Nova Scotia with the Cajuns. Chow-chow is often mixed with mayo or remoulade on cold-cut poorboys. Try this with pork chops or sliced pork tenderloin. + With so much garden production, the Inn at Dos Brisas has plenty of ingredients for chow-chow. Celery, fennel, and squash all taste great in this pickled relish. Don't be afraid to experiment.

4 cups chopped onions
4 cups chopped cabbage
2 cups chopped green tomato
2 cups chopped green bell pepper
1 cup chopped red bell pepper
½ cup kosher or pickling salt
2 tablespoons brown mustard seeds
1 tablespoon celery seeds
1 tablespoon dry mustard powder
3 cups sugar
1 cup cider vinegar
1¼ cups [Green Curry Paste](#)
Fresh thai chiles, for garnish
Basil leaves, for serving

Combine the onions, cabbage, green tomatoes, green bell pepper, and red bell pepper (or vegetables of your choice) in a mixing bowl and sprinkle with the salt. Mix well. Allow the mixture to sweat for 12 hours or up to 1 day in the refrigerator.

Combine the mustard seeds, celery seeds, mustard powder, sugar, and vinegar in a soup pot on the stove over medium heat. Rinse the salted vegetable mixture with cold water in a colander or strainer in several batches to remove some of the saltiness. Add the rinsed vegetables to the vinegar mixture in the soup pot. Bring to a boil, then turn down the heat and simmer until thickened, but juicy, about 1 hour.

When the chow-chow is ready, add the green curry paste and mix well. Store the chow-chow in the refrigerator for up to a week. Alternatively, preserve the chow-chow in pint jars: Fill each jar with chow-chow and add a fresh Thai chile for garnish, then close the lid tightly. Place the pint jars in a large, empty stockpot, making sure the jars do not touch, and place the stockpot on the stove. Fill the stockpot with cold water to cover the jars by at least 1 inch, then put the lid on and turn the heat to high. Bring to a boil and then let the jars boil for 15 minutes. Carefully remove the jars from the stockpot using tongs, let cool, then check the seals.

To serve, mix a cup or so of chow-chow with a few basil leaves and serve in a small bowl as a condiment.

RAJ DIXIT’S PINEAPPLE PIQUE

————Makes 4 cups————

Pique, the Puerto Rican hot sauce made by steeping fruit and peppers in vinegar, is the traditional sauce with lechon, the island’s famous spit-roasted pork dish. Pique is also used liberally splashed on broiled fish and other seafood dishes. This elaborate pineapple pique variation was concocted by chef Raj Dixit. Use as a dipping sauce for shrimp or other seafood, or as a barbecue sauce with roasted pork.

2 cups rice vinegar
1 cup pineapple juice
2 large slices of pineapple rind
2 large garlic cloves, minced
1 shallot, thinly sliced
4 fresh green Thai chiles, halved lengthwise
1 habanero-type chile, halved
1 teaspoon toasted cumin seeds
1 tablespoon black peppercorns
1 sprig of fresh herb, such as thyme or oregano
1 tablespoon salt

Combine all the ingredients in a 1-quart mason jar and screw on the lid. Leave outside overnight and all day in the sun. Set aside on a counter or in a cupboard and allow to steep for at least 2 weeks and up to several months. Strain the sauce and serve as a condiment.

Raj Dixit’s Pineapple Pique and Crushed Red Pepper Dipping Sauce: For a hotter version, pour 1 cup of prepared pique into a bowl and add 1 tablespoon of crushed dried chile pequins, Aleppo peppers, or other crushed red pepper.

ZAK PELACCIO’S MALAYSIAN CHICKEN WINGS

————Serves 6; makes about 30 whole wings————

When Zak Pelaccio lived in Kuala Lumpur, one of his favorite street-food carts sold sweet and spicy chicken wings. He ate a lot of them. In Asia, street food isn’t an occasional snack that you eat between meals—for many people, it’s the source of every cooked meal. + In Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, the temperature seldom dips below 90°F and many homes are not air-conditioned. Tossing together a salad or cutting up some fruit is not a problem under these circumstances, but serious cooking, like frying and grilling are more sensibly done outdoors. + Asian street vendors buy their ingredients in bulk and sell famous items like chili crab and fish noodles for less than a home cook would spend trying to recreate the dishes. At Pelaccio’s New York restaurant, Fatty Crab, he offers his own approximation of Malaysian street food. Here’s his recipe for Kuala Lumpur chicken wings, adapted from Food and Wine magazine. It’s definitely best [to grind your own spices](#)

12 small dried red Thai chiles, toasted and ground
3 tablespoons ground coriander seeds
1½ tablespoons ground fennel seeds
1 tablespoon ground cumin seeds
½ cup sugar
cup molasses
½ cup fish sauce
½ cup low-sodium soy sauce
⅓ cup soy sauce
8 garlic cloves, smashed and peeled
1 (4-inch) piece fresh ginger, thinly sliced
5 pounds whole chicken wings (or a combination of chicken wings and drumsticks)

Combine the ground chiles and spices in a medium bowl and whisk in the sugar, molasses, fish sauce, soy sauces, garlic, and ginger. Divide the wings among 2 or 3 zippered plastic bags and pour in the marinade. Refrigerate for 4 hours, turning occasionally.

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Cover two baking sheets with aluminum foil and place wire racks on each baking sheet.

Remove the wings from the marinade and pat dry with paper towels; reserve the marinade. Arrange the wings on the wire racks set on the baking sheets. Roast for about 40 minutes, or until well browned and cooked through.

While the wings are cooking, strain the marinade into a medium saucepan and bring to a boil. Cook over medium-high heat until thick and sticky, about 20 minutes. Transfer the marinade to a large bowl. When the wings are done, add them to the bowl and toss to coat with the sauce. Pile on plates and serve immediately.

DAVID CHANG’S RED-EYE MAYO

————Makes 1 cup————

Not many people realize that David Chang is a Southerner (he grew up in Virginia). This twangy sauce was inspired by the red-eye gravy Southerners eat for breakfast. The original is made in the frying pan that bacon or country ham was cooked in. Chang serves this version, adapted from his book Momofuku, with paper-thin slices of country ham. Skip this recipe if you want to avoid eating raw eggs.

1 large egg
1 tablespoon instant coffee crystals
2 tablespoons cold water
1½ teaspoons sherry vinegar
½ teaspoon salt, or more to taste
½ teaspoon Sriracha sauce, [homemade](#) or store-bought, or more to taste
1 cup grapeseed or other neutral oil

Combine the egg, instant coffee, water, vinegar, salt, and Sriracha in a food processor or blender (or, if making the mayonnaise by hand, in a mixing bowl). Start the machine (or start whisking) and add the grapeseed oil in a slow, steady stream. Process (or whisk) until the mixture is thick and creamy. Check it for seasoning (it may, but probably won't, need more salt) and use immediately, or store in the refrigerator for up to a week.

Easy Version: Omit the egg and grapeseed oil. Add the coffee, vinegar, salt, and Sriracha to 1 cup of bottled mayonnaise and mix well.

BRYAN CASWELL'S SRIRACHA CITRUS REMOULADE

————Makes 1½ cups————

Bryan Caswell grew up on Cajun remoulade, the spicy mayonnaise usually made with Creole mustard. I love the Sriracha remoulade he serves with the French fries at his slider restaurant in Houston, Little Big's. When I make Sriracha remoulade at home, I usually cheat and start with a bottled mayonnaise. Here's Caswell's recipe for the made-from-scratch version. Skip this recipe if you want to avoid eating raw eggs.

2 egg yolks
1½ teaspoons chopped shallot
1 teaspoon chopped garlic
2 teaspoons freshly squeezed lime juice
2 teaspoons freshly squeezed grapefruit juice
2 teaspoons freshly squeezed orange juice
3 tablespoons Sriracha sauce, [homemade](#) or store-bought
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
¾ cup grapeseed oil, plus a bit more if needed

1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro
In a mixing bowl, combine egg yolks, shallot, garlic, lime juice, grapefruit juice, orange juice, Sriracha sauce, salt, and Worcestershire sauce. Pour the oil in slowly, whisking vigorously; add a bit more oil, if consistency is too thick. Stir in the cilantro just before serving.

Easy Version: Omit the egg yolks and grapeseed oil. Start with 1½ cups bottled mayonnaise and stir in the other ingredients, adding the cilantro just before serving.

BRYAN CASWELL'S SHRIMP WITH SRIRACHA CITRUS REMOULADE

————Serves 4————

Bryan Caswell is a vocal supporter of Gulf seafood. And he will remind you that wild-caught Gulf shrimp is always a safer bet than farm-raised shrimp from unspecified and untested Asian sources. Wild-caught Gulf brown shrimp is the most flavorful shrimp on the market. It's the perfect choice for spicy dishes like this one. If you don't like the "iodine" flavor of brown shrimp, try the milder-flavored wild-caught Gulf white shrimp.

Basting Butter

1 cup butter, softened
1½ tablespoons chopped flat-leaf parsley
1½ tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
2 tablespoons chopped garlic
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
3 tablespoons dry white wine
½ tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice

Curry Rub

1½ tablespoons powdered chile, such as Aleppo or chile pequin
1½ tablespoons ground cumin
1½ tablespoons white pepper
1 tablespoon Madras curry powder
1 tablespoon salt
1 tablespoon paprika
1½ teaspoons garlic powder
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 teaspoon finely ground black pepper
1½ pounds large (18–24 count) Gulf shrimp, peeled and deveined

[Sriracha Citrus Remoulade](#), to serve

Soak several bamboo skewers in water to cover for 20 minutes. Spray a gas grill with cooking oil spray and preheat to hot.

To make the basting butter, combine the butter, parsley, cilantro, garlic, salt, black pepper, and cayenne in a food processor and pulse until blended. Combine the wine and lemon juice in a separate bowl. With the food processor running, slowly add the wine and lemon juice to the butter mixture and process until smooth.

To make the curry rub, mix all the ingredients together in a mixing bowl.

Thread the shrimp onto the skewers (they should touch and all face the same way). Brush with the basting butter, then dust generously with the rub. Put the skewers on the hot grill and cook with the lid down, or cover the shrimp with the lid of a large pan. Brush several times with basting butter

and turn once. Sprinkle with more rub as needed. Cook until done, about 3 minutes on each side.
Serve with the remoulade.

RANDY CLEMENS’S SRIRACHA-SESAME FRUIT SALAD

————Serves 6 to 8————

If you’ve ever dipped a mango in chile powder at a Mexican fruteria or had Indian fruit salad with salt, pepper, and cayenne, you already know how refreshing the combination of fruit and chile peppers can be. In *The Sriracha Cookbook*, Randy Clemens takes hot and spicy fruit salad upscale with a sophisticated dressing.

- Dressing
- ¼ cup toasted sesame oil
 - ¼ cup seasoned rice vinegar
 - ½ cup honey
 - 2 tablespoons Sriracha, [homemade](#) or store-bought
 - 2 tablespoons white sesame seeds
 - ¼ teaspoon low-sodium soy sauce

- Fruit Salad
- 1 medium pineapple, peeled, cored, and cubed
 - 2 mangoes, peeled, cored, and cubed
 - 1 papaya, peeled and cubed
 - 2 bananas, peeled and sliced
 - 2 kiwis, peeled, halved lengthwise, and sliced
 - 1 pint strawberries, hulled and quartered
 - ½ cup sweetened flaked coconut, for garnish
 - Fresh mint, cut into thin ribbons, for garnish

To make the dressing, in a medium bowl, whisk together the oil, vinegar, honey, Sriracha, sesame seeds, and soy sauce. Set aside.
To make the fruit salad, in a large mixing bowl, combine the pineapple, mangoes, papaya, bananas, kiwis, and strawberries. Add the dressing and toss gently. Serve immediately or store, refrigerated, in an airtight container for up to 3 days. Garnish with the coconut and mint.

CHRIS SHEPHERD’S NUOC CHAM CHICKEN SALAD

————Serves 1————

“We hope you will enjoy Chris Shepherd’s refined take on Houston’s New American Creole Cuisine,” reads the top of the menu at Underbelly, Shepherd’s restaurant on Lower Westheimer in Space City. + This Vietnamese-style chicken salad on the lunch menu at Underbelly is a perfect hot-weather meal. It’s also a great way to use up leftover chicken. Be sure and add lots of chiles or chile paste to the Nuoc Mam Cham when you’re making this dish.

- 4 ounces shredded cooked chicken
- 1 cup shredded green cabbage
- ½ cup shredded purple cabbage
- ¼ cup julienned carrots
- ¼ cup finely chopped scallion, white and green parts
- ½ cup [Nuoc Mam Cham](#), plus more to serve

Toss all the ingredients together and mix well. Serve on a salad plate with chopsticks and extra dipping sauce.

STEPHAN PYLES’S SHRIMP CEVICHE

————Serves 6 to 8————

The ancient ceviches of Peru and Ecuador featured raw fish “cooked” in a highly acidic citrus sauce. Mexican ceviches served near the Bay of Campeche in the Yucatán, a center of the shrimp fishery, are often reminiscent of shrimp cocktails. This modern American version of shrimp ceviche borrows from both traditions—the garnish of popcorn is typically Peruvian.

- Ceviche
- 1 pound small shrimp, peeled and deveined
 - 2 yellow tomatoes, [roasted](#), peeled, seeded, and chopped
 - 1 jalapeño chile, [roasted](#), peeled, stemmed, seeded, and chopped
 - 1 small yellow bell pepper, [roasted](#), peeled, seeded, and chopped
 - ½ cup freshly squeezed lime juice
 - ½ cup freshly squeezed orange juice
 - 2 teaspoons sugar
 - Tabasco or [Papaya Fire](#) sauce

- To Serve
- ½ red onion, thinly sliced
 - 1 tablespoon chopped scallions, white and green parts
 - 1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro
 - ½ cup freshly popped popcorn
- To make the ceviche, bring 4 quarts of lightly salted water to a boil. Remove from the heat, add the shrimp, and let sit for 2 minutes. Drain and chill shrimp.

In a blender, combine the tomatoes, jalapeño, bell pepper, lime juice, orange juice, and sugar. Add Tabasco sauce to taste. Blend on medium speed until smooth, about 2 minutes.
Combine the chilled shrimp and puréed tomato mixture in a mixing bowl and season with salt to taste. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes and up to several hours, or until the flavors meld.
About 30 minutes prior to serving, add the red onion, scallions, and cilantro to the shrimp. Adjust the seasoning as necessary. Garnish with the popcorn just before serving.

STEPHAN PYLES'S HABANERO CRANBERRY SAUCE

————Makes 4 cups————

Stephan Pyles served this spicy cranberry sauce during the holidays at his Dallas restaurant. He says it goes great with turkey, grilled quail, dove, or other game birds.

1 tablespoon olive oil

½ onion, diced

2 cloves garlic, chopped

½ habanero-type chile, stemmed, seeded, and chopped

2 cups cranberries

Juice of 2 oranges

Juice of 1 lime

1 teaspoon cider vinegar

¾ cup light brown sugar

1 tablespoon pasilla chile purée

1 cup chicken stock

1 teaspoon dry mustard powder

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

Salt

Heat the oil in a small saucepan over medium heat until lightly smoking. Add the onion and sauté for 1 minute. Add the garlic and habanero and continue to cook until the onion is translucent, 2 to 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the cranberries and cook over medium heat for another 5 minutes. Add the orange juice and lime juice and reduce to a glaze, about 3 minutes; the cranberries will be a paste.

Whisk in the vinegar, brown sugar, and pasilla purée; cook until thick, about 3 minutes. Add the chicken stock and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for about 5 minutes. Whisk in the dry mustard and Dijon mustard; simmer for 2 more minutes. Strain through a fine sieve, pressing hard against strainer to get as much pulp as possible. The sauce should be thick at this point. Season with salt and serve as a condiment. Stored in the refrigerator, this sauce will keep for up to a week.

FIRE AND ICE CREAM

————Makes 1 quart————

Last year I asked food blog readers to submit their ideas for innovative hot sauce dishes by way of a recipe contest. Many thanks to Hot Sauce Cookbook Recipe Contest grand prize winner Mary Frances Fatsis for her spicy coconut ice cream recipe. + It's the perfect ending to our hot sauce adventures.

1 (16 ounce) can cream of coconut

1¼ cups half-and-half

½ cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons Tabasco Green Pepper Sauce

½ cup sweetened shredded coconut

Grated zest from 2 limes, plus more for garnish

4 to 6 graham crackers, each separated into 4 sections, for garnish

Whisk together the cream of coconut, half-and-half, cream, Tabasco, coconut, and lime zest. Chill thoroughly.

Process the chilled mixture in an ice-cream maker according to manufacturer's directions. Transfer to a freezer container and freeze for 1 to 4 hours.

Serve sprinkled with extra grated lime zest and a few sections of graham crackers.

GLOSSARY OF HOT SAUCE–RELATED TERMS

chil Nahuatl prefix for chile peppers.

chilmole Nahuatl for ground chile sauce.

chile Spanish word for a chile pepper, also the name of a dish in New Mexico consisting of green or red chiles in a stew.

chili English spelling of the Spanish word chile, also short for chili con carne, the meat and chile dish from Texas.

chile pepper Though somewhat redundant, this term makes it clear you are talking about the pod, and not the New Mexican dish called chile, or the Texas dish called chili.

enchilada sauce A chile sauce used to make enchiladas. Enchilada is an adjective meaning “chilled,” and the full name of the dish is tortillas enchiladas.

green chile sauce A salsa made with New Mexican green chiles.

chile Colorado sauce Any red chile sauce.

chile con queso Cheese dip made with chiles.

gochujang Complex fermented Korean pepper sauce.

hot sauce Any spicy sauce.

mole A sauce made by grinding, such as guacamole or mole poblano.

molcajete sauce A sauce made in the lava stone grinding bowl called a molcajete, or in a similar style.

nuoc cham Generic name for a thin Vietnamese dipping sauce.

pepper sauce Name used to describe shaker bottle sauces like Tabasco.

picante sauce Tex-Mex for salsa picante.

pico de gallo Freshly chopped, uncooked salsa picante.

ranchero sauce A thin tomato and chile sauce used to make huevos rancheros, ranchero steak, cabrito in ranchero sauce, etc.

red chile sauce A salsa made with New Mexican red chiles.

salsa While this is the Spanish word for a sauce of any kind, the term “salsa” has entered the English lexicon and is defined by Webster’s as “a spicy sauce of tomatoes, onions, and hot peppers.”

salsa picante Spanish for hot sauce.

salsa verde A green sauce, such as tomatillo sauce or green chile sauce.

sambal Name given to a wide variety of chile sauces made in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore.

Sriracha sauce Thai hot sauce named after the coastal city of Si Racha in Chohburi Province.

taco sauce Any sauce used on tacos.

Tuong ot toi Thick Vietnamese chile garlic sauce.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



A three-time James Beard award winner, ROBB WALSH is the author of ten previous books, including *Texas Eats* and *The Tex-Mex Cookbook*. As the former editor-in-chief of *Chile Pepper* magazine and the founder of the annual Austin Hot Sauce Festival, Walsh is recognized as one of the foremost hot sauce authorities in the country. Visit www.robbwalsh.com.

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