Chile peppers are thought to have originated in South America, but they have been cultivated all over the world for centuries, resulting in a wide variety of species with different colors, shapes, flavors, and, of course, spiciness. We consulted pepper expert and grower David Winsberg from Northern California’s Happy Quail Farms to put together a chart of some common peppers as well as a few less common varieties that are now becoming available in the United States thanks to specialty growers like Winsberg. Average size and hotness scale (from 1 to 5) included.

**Aji Rojo**
Common in a lot of Peruvian cooking, the aji rojo is more of an orange-red than a true red pepper. It has a similar heat level to cayenne and can be chopped finely and added to ceviche or mixed with cheese or cream to make a sauce to serve over potatoes or chicken.

**AVERAGE SIZE:**
About 2 to 4 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 4

**Shishito**
Popular in Japan, the shishito has thin walls, mild heat, and a little sweetness. It is good simply fried, drizzled with some soy sauce and sesame oil, and eaten whole. It also makes tasty tempura.

**AVERAGE SIZE:**
About 2 to 4 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 1 to 2
(occasionally you might get a 2 to 3)

**Thai**
This tiny chile adds serious amounts of heat to Southeast Asian cuisines. You may find either green or red Thai chiles; both are very spicy. Throw them whole into Thai soups like tom kha gai, purée them for curry pastes, or chop them up for any dish where you want to add heat.

**AVERAGE SIZE:**
About 1 to 2 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 5
Bell
The most common sweet pepper, bells are usually seen in red, green, and yellow, but there are also purple, brown, and orange varieties. They are a crunchy, juicy pepper that is great for eating raw on salads, sautéing, or roasting and chopping up to throw on a pizza or a sandwich.

**AVERAGE SIZE:**
About 3 to 6 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 1

Anaheim
Named after the city in Southern California, the Anaheim is a big, mild chile that’s good for stuffing. Its skin is a little tough, but it peels pretty easily if you roast it first. Good roasted, cut into strips, and thrown into a salad; stuffed with meat and grilled; used in salsa verde; or added to cheese enchiladas.

**AVERAGE SIZE:**
About 5 to 6 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 1

Poblano
(a.k.a. Ancho)
A good, easy-to-find grilling pepper that’s ideal for stuffing to make chiles rellenos with a kick of heat. Poblanos get fairly big and are usually sold fresh, while they are younger and dark green. At their red, mature stage they are usually dried (and in their dried form they are called ancho chiles).

**AVERAGE SIZE:**
About 4 to 5 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 2 to 3

Habanero
Native to parts of Central America and the Caribbean, this little pepper packs a lot of heat and should be used judiciously. You’ll find different colors, ranging from red to white-yellow and even brown, but orange is the most common. Great for salsa, hot sauces, or a fiery jerk chicken.

**AVERAGE SIZE:**
About 2 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 5

Chilaca
(a.k.a. Pasilla)
This is a Mexican variety that matures from dark green to dark chocolate brown. It’s a versatile pepper that’s good for sauces, roasting, and grilling when fresh. Dried it’s called a pasilla and is common in mole recipes.

**AVERAGE SIZE:**
About 7 to 9 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 2 to 3

Hot Cherry
These vary in size and shape and are very hot. They are usually round, though sometimes more of a triangular shape. Cherry peppers can also be sweet. They’re most often used in pickling.

**AVERAGE SIZE:**
About 1 to 2 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 4
**Hot Banana**
There are both sweet and hot varieties of the banana pepper, known as bácskai fehér in Hungary, where they are often used in Hungarian lecsó (a dish of stewed peppers and eggs). They are commonly pickled, and are also good served grilled with meats.

**AVERAGE SIZE:** About 6 to 7 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 2

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**Jalapeño**
(a.k.a. Chipotle)
Familiar stuffed with cream cheese and deep-fried as a bar snack, the jalapeño is probably the best-known pepper in the States. Harvested at both its green and red stages, the jalapeño is spicy but easy to seed and devein if you wish to remove some of the heat. When dried and smoked, it’s called a chipotle chile.

**AVERAGE SIZE:** About 2 to 3 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 2 to 3

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**Cayenne**
This bright red pepper is usually consumed in its dried, powdered form, known as cayenne pepper. When ripe and fresh, cayenne chiles are long, skinny, and very hot.

**AVERAGE SIZE:** About 2 to 6 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 4 to 5

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**Serrano**
Spicier than the jalapeño, the serrano is a small Mexican pepper with thick, juicy walls, so it’s a great hot-salsa pepper, and is widely available and versatile. It is most commonly sold in its green stage (it turns red and then yellow as it gets older). You can also find serranos pickled or dried.

**AVERAGE SIZE:** About 1.5 to 2.5 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 3

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**Hungarian Pimento**
This is a type of pimento (or pimiento) pepper, which is what you often find stuffed in green olives. It is a large, sweet red pepper, similar to a bell but with an extra-thick, juicy wall. It’s an ideal roasting pepper, and is great to eat raw with dip.

**AVERAGE SIZE:** About 4 to 6 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 1

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**Guernica**
The Guernica is a Spanish pepper similar to the Pimiento de Padrón in flavor but bigger and without any heat, says Winsberg. It is often served fried like the Padrón or stuffed with cheese or other fillings. It develops a tougher skin as it matures, and then is best roasted and peeled.

**AVERAGE SIZE:** About 3 to 5 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 1

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**Cayenne**
This bright red pepper is usually consumed in its dried, powdered form, known as cayenne pepper. When ripe and fresh, cayenne chiles are long, skinny, and very hot.

**AVERAGE SIZE:** About 2 to 6 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 4 to 5
Piquillo
The ultimate pepper for roasting, the Spanish piquillo has become very popular because of its intensely sweet flavor and bright red color. It is usually only available canned or jarred, but it’s becoming easier to find fresh. It is often roasted, peeled, and stuffed with a variety of fillings like salt cod, tuna, or cheese.

**AVERAGE SIZE:** About 3 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 1

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**Basque Fryer**
(a.k.a. Piment d’Anglet, Doux Long des Landes)
A French pepper used in many French Basque recipes. It is a twisty, long pepper that when green has a distinct peppery taste and tender skin. When it turns red, it gets very sweet. It excels in sauces, chopped up and sautéed for a pipérade, or fried with meats or sausage.

**AVERAGE SIZE:** About 6 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 1

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**Pimiento de Padrón**
This pepper is a specialty grown in Galicia in northern Spain. It is traditionally eaten fried in olive oil and tossed with salt; it is harvested young with a tender skin and no mature seeds, so it’s perfect for eating whole. It is generally mild with a nutty flavor, though one in a dozen will be pretty hot.

**AVERAGE SIZE:** About 2 to 4 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 1 (but the hot ones, even when young, can be 2 to 3)

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**Guindilla Verde**
From the Basque area in Spain, this is a tender pepper with a distinct sweetness. The variety shown is from the Bilbao region. It shouldn’t be confused with the more widely available jarred guindillas—guindilla is a name applied to several distinct regional varieties in Spain ranging from marble-size scorchers to these sweet large fryers.

**AVERAGE SIZE:** About 6 inches long

**SPICINESS:** 1

For more information on chile peppers, go to www.chow.com/stories/11811.