

# Mild or Intense, peppers make the hot ticket



## • AMP UP COLOR AND FLAVOR •

*by Bill Lubing*

Fresh, dried, stuffed, chopped, baked, or found strung on a string. From mild to intense, from bright green to smoky red, we love our chili peppers. While most of us are familiar with the jalapeño, there are a multitude of both milder and more intense peppers that are grown in our area. Just ask Ted and Joan Ballweg, proprietors of Out of Our Gourd, a small company specializing in chili pepper products.

Raised in the Middleton, Wisconsin, area on a traditional farm, Ted well remembers tending to the acres of corn, apples, and other crops and “selling sweet corn door to door.” Now the Ballwegs raise thousands of peppers on one-third of an acre in the Waunakee area. “The things I hate to do were reduced and the things I love were increased,” explains Ted, referring to weeding and tweaking his methods to produce the best possible product. As it turns out, Wisconsin is a good place to raise peppers.



*Ted Ballweg*

“In Wisconsin I don’t worry about the weather for growing peppers because our weather is very good for them,” says Ted. “We ship to almost every state because they don’t have the variety that we do.”

Along with good genetics, he cites the other key to pepper success: good soil. Using raised beds for growing, Ted notes that “I brought in 150 yards of dirt. And that soil needs to be healthy and it needs to breathe. Then your plants will be healthy.”

When you see Ted and Joan’s peppers at the Dane County Farmers’ Market, it’s obvious they’re freshly

picked, with a shiny, glistening patina and firm, smooth skin. Those, of course, are the ones that have not been dried, ground, or used to produce Out of Our Gourd pepper products. What began as a class marketing project when Joan went back to school to earn her degree in International Marketing has turned into a small yet robust business that the couple plans to ride through retirement.

Derived from a mix of mild to intense peppers, the couple's ground pepper seasonings are hugely popular. Ted says he has spent years perfecting his techniques to raise, dry, and then mix peppers for maximum flavor. "It's not about hot," he says. "It's about intense flavor."

Along with the dry seasonings, Out of Our Gourd also produces two infused oils, one peanut oil based and the other, called Pepperolio, using olive oil. Their Chili Vinaigrette is a less intense product consisting of oil, vinegar, mustard, and chili peppers. Want something that's not only nice to look at but flavorful as well? Check out the bottles of Chili Vinegar, stuffed full of a rainbow variety of peppers and some pretty intense vinegar.

"The key to our business is that full-mouth hit-all-of-the-taste-buds flavor when we start putting these together into one mix," says an enthusiastic Ted.

A familiar face at the Fitchburg Farmers' Market as well as Dane County, Jennifer Gillette owns Bird's Nest Nursery & Garden. Nestled within the rolling hills around Belleville, Wisconsin, she raises 13 varieties of peppers along with flowers, potatoes, onions, carrots, beets, and beans.

She says that while the



*From mild to intense fresh peppers can add flavor and nutrition to any meal.*

anaheim is her favorite pepper, the poblano is best for stuffing. With football season underway, she notes a great recipe for stuffed jalapeños. "Clean out the peppers," she says. "Brown Italian sausage, then mix in cream cheese and another cheese. Mix it all together, stuff it into the peppers, and put bread crumbs on top. Bake in a high-temp oven until they get crispy. It's delicious!"



*Joan Ballweg (left) brings her marketing and product development skills to the mix while husband Ted enjoys tending to the crops.*



*Among other crops, Jennifer Gillette grows around 12 varieties of peppers at Bird's Nest Nursery & Garden in Belleville, Wisconsin.*

### JAMAICAN ESCOVICH

#### Ingredients

Simmer covered in water:

- 1 green bell pepper seeded, sliced
- 1 medium onion, thinly sliced
- 1 large carrot, thinly sliced
- 1 bay leaf
- ¼ teaspoon minced fresh ginger
- 3 peppercorns

After 30 minutes add:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ¼ cup Chili Vinegar

Simmer two minutes then strain. Heat three tablespoons olive oil in a heavy fry pan and sauté one pound of snapper or other white fish fillets until lightly browned on both sides. Drain fish and pour hot strained sauce over or chill in sauce and serve garnished with olives and pimientos.

*Courtesy of Ted and Joan Ballweg at Out of Our Gourd*


## • FOR MORE INFORMATION •

Bird's Nest Nursery  
& Garden  
Jennifer Gillette  
(608) 424-3114

Out of Our Gourd  
Ted and Joan Ballweg  
(608) 849-8842  
chilies@tds.net

Jennifer also makes pepper ristras, which are basically strings of dried peppers on raffia, a string made from palm fronds. "You can use them for decoration," she says, "or hang them up in the kitchen and use them for cooking."

Whether you cook with them or use them for decoration, the variety and utility of chili peppers should be celebrated. "Whether they are fresh or dried," notes Ted, "I say it's like a party in your mouth."



**SIX POPULAR CHILIES:**  
All of these chilies are raised by both Jennifer and the Ballwegs and are generally easy to find from other sources as well. It's advisable to wear rubber gloves or other protection when handling chili peppers, as the capsicum (the "hot" in peppers) can persist an amazingly long time on the skin.

- 1 **Anaheim:** Quite mild. Six to eight inches in size. Dark, shiny green. Great for stuffing or adding to salsas.
- 2 **Cayenne:** Well into the hot side. From four to twelve inches in length. Deep green, yellow, orange, or red. Long, thin, and furrowed in appearance.
- 3 **Jalapeño:** On a measure of hotness from 1 (mild) to 10 (hot) the ubiquitous jalapeño rates a three. They range in color from dark green to red.
- 4 **Poblano:** Mild to medium hot, with a slower build to peak flavor intensity. They are a large pepper and are mossy dark green.
- 5 **Serrano:** More hot than not, this meaty pepper grows between one and four inches long and can be found in a variety of colors, including red, brown, orange, or yellow. They are popular in Mexican and Thai dishes.
- 6 **Thai Hot:** Not to be confused with the ornamental variety, these tiny peppers will produce partying in your mouth more on the lines of a "rave" than a State affair.

Bountiful Cupboard  
**Marketplace**

COFFEE HOUSE



**CREMA CAFÉ**  
A casual spot focusing on local and organic fare. Alterra Coffee, espresso beverages, smoothies. Breakfast menu features waffles, seasonal frittatas, and house-made bakery. Lunch menu features inventive sandwiches, salads, and great soups. Kids' area and menu. Crema-Style Happy Hour M-F, 3-6 P.M. Café hours are M-F 6 A.M.-6 P.M., Sat. 7 A.M.-4 P.M., Sun. closed. VISA, MasterCard, Discover. Free WiFi. 4124 Monona Drive, Madison (in Lake Edge Shopping Mall). www.goodcrema.com, Ph. (608) 224-1150

SALON



601 N. Whitney Way  
Madison, WI 53705  
(608) 233-0357 Cut • Color • Manicure • Waxing • Massage

TEXTILES



**ALTERATIONS BY SUE**  
Sue Petkovsek  
Professional Seamstress

Specializing in alterations of bridesmaids' gowns and formal wear.

STOUGHTON, WI  
PHONE: (608) 873-0374  
EMAIL: gpetkovsek@aol.com

- By Appointment -

MEATS

MacFarlane Pheasants, Inc.

2821 South U.S. Hwy 51  
Janesville WI 53546

608-757-7881  
800-345-8348



www.pheasant.com

CUPBOARD

**SMALL, TASTY, SATISFYING.**  
A little like your favorite snack, and a lot like a Marketplace ad. Say a little, say a lot. Make your point, make it pop. **MARKETPLACE ADS — YOUR AD HERE —**

BATH & BODY



**SOAP BY MOM**  
Handcrafted soap, inspired by nature... made by Mom! 21 soap recipes; custom design your own gift baskets; special order for allergy sufferers; all Mom's soaps are hand stirred, hand cut, and allowed to air dry; no detergents or artificial dyes. Ask about our rubber duckies! Bring your dry skin to Mom! Visit our new store. 10984 N. Hillside Dr., Edgerton, WI 53534, Ph. (608) 884-2221, Fax (608) 884-2215. www.soapbymom.com

## FINDS FROM READERS LIKE YOU



**SJOLINDS CHOCOLATE HOUSE**  
219 East Main Street  
Mount Horeb, Wisconsin 53572  
(608) 437-0233  
Jason from Madison recommends: "This is my favorite chocolate place. They have the most wonderful homemade truffles and European-baked goods. They also carry a variety of candy from around the world."



**ORANGE TREE IMPORTS**  
1721 Monroe Street  
Madison, WI 53711  
(608) 255-8211  
(888) 245-1860 Toll-free  
Jan from Waunakee recommends: "I really enjoy going to Orange Tree Imports to see what they have that is new. Their specialty shop has an incredible combination of gifts including kitchenware, toys, specialty foods, cards, glassware, and more. They offer a large variety of specialty cooking classes. I really enjoy giving gift certificates to my friends."  
[www.orangetreeimports.com](http://www.orangetreeimports.com)



**JIM'S LIQUOR**  
965 North Page Street  
Stoughton, WI 53589  
(608) 873-0860  
John from Stoughton recommends: "They have a wide variety of imported beers in addition to American beers. I really like McEwans Scotch Ale, which is imported and originally brewed for the royal family."  
[www.bottledpleasure.com](http://www.bottledpleasure.com)



**COOKIES BY DESIGN**  
7414 Mineral Point Road  
Madison, WI 53717  
(608) 829-2939  
(800) 525-5153 Toll Free  
Marie from Madison recommends: "These cookies are a 'kids dream'. If you want to take a really adorable gift to a Halloween party, try taking these hand-decorated, colorful cookies instead of candy. Do you need a favor for your children's birthday parties? Try these customized and personalized cookies. If you are too busy to pick up your personalized party favors, delivery is available."  
[www.cookiesbydesign.com](http://www.cookiesbydesign.com)



**CONSTANT CRAVINGS, LLC**  
152 Broad Street  
Lake Geneva, WI 53147  
(262) 248-8450  
(888) 348-8450 Toll Free  
Norma and Marty from San Diego, California recommends: "While we were visiting some friends in Lake Geneva we went to Constant Cravings, LLC. What a wonderful popcorn and confection shop. We sampled many things, then bought all 13 different flavors of the malted milk balls. We are going to try to decide which one is our favorite on the flight home."  
[www.constantcravings.net](http://www.constantcravings.net)



**MARIE'S ORIGINAL BAKERY**  
307 South Barstow  
Eau Claire, WI 54702  
Liz from Eau Claire recommends: "Marie's has incredible breads and pastries that can be a wonderful addition to any meal. I use their baguettes for all my party bruschetta."  
[www.mariesoriginalbakery.com](http://www.mariesoriginalbakery.com)



a stroll across thyme  
fragrance in the garden path  
gathering petals

**FISKARS®**

[www.fiskars.com](http://www.fiskars.com)