

Photos by Dennis McDonald

Every Jamaican household has a jar of pickled peppers, according to Janet Davis.

Both the liquid from the jars and the bits of peppers and carrots are used to add extra flavor and spice to dishes at the table.

Though Davis likes to use canning jars, these peppers aren't actually canned in the traditional way, so they have to be stored in the refrigerator — but they'll keep for months there.

Though nothing else has the flavor of scotch bonnets, you could use other chile peppers — habaneros, if you want the same level of heat, or jalapenos or serranos, if you'd like something that's milder but still spicy.

Be careful when you handle any hot peppers. It's a good idea to wear gloves if you're handling a quantity of hot peppers, and don't rub your eyes, or you'll get quite a burn.



Pickled Pepper Jar

- 1 dozen scotch bonnet peppers
- 1 large sweet onion
- 1 large carrot
- 1/3 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons whole allspice
- 2 cups white distilled vinegar

Slice peppers, onion and carrots and distribute evenly into two canning jars. Sprinkle in salt and whole allspice. Add vinegar.

Place the lids on the jars and shake lightly a few times.

This will get more flavorful the longer it stays in the refrigerator, where it will keep for months. Drizzle the liquid (and bits of the pepper or carrots, if you like) over food to give it a flavor of the islands. It's especially good on fried fish and other seafood.

Dare to cook with scotch bonnets, and you'll see why Jamaican cooks love the flavor as much as the fire.

Turn up the

Heat



Janet Davis learned to love scotch bonnet peppers while she was growing up in Jamaica.

By Betty Cichy
Staff writer

Some of the hottest peppers in the world are also the most beautiful.

Take the scotch bonnet, a Caribbean pepper that glows in tropical hues, from green to yellow, orange and red.

The name comes from its resemblance to the Scottish cap called a tam o'shanter, which has a full, rounded crown gathered into a narrow brim, and a pompom on top.

On the scotch bonnet, the stem is where the pompom would be, and the walls of the pepper puff out from there, sometimes doubling back on themselves before they taper in graceful folds and wrinkles down to the base.

Scotch bonnets are just so cute that you might be tempted to pop one in your mouth, like a gumdrop or a piece of hard candy.

But don't. You might not want to live long enough to regret it.

Scotch bonnets are searingly hot peppers. On the Scoville scale, which measures the level of the heat-producing compound capsaicin, scotch bonnets rank near the top.

They're on a par with habaneros, though not as hot as Red Savina habaneros, which used to be considered the world's hottest pepper, or bhut jalokia, the latest champion.

Still, the scotch bonnet is more than 60 times hotter than a jalapeno, which might make you wonder why, unless you're a chile head, you'd want to try it at all.

Janet Davis has the answer.

"The scotch bonnet is citrusy. It's smoky. It's flavorful," says Davis, a TV chef and caterer from Westampton. "It's not just heat for heat's sake."



Hot and sour shrimp, D2

Davis was born in Jamaica, where scotch bonnets are revered for the combination of flavor and spice they bring to all sorts of dishes. She's such a fan that she named her catering company after the peppers, and she often uses them in the classes she teaches at Kitchen Kapers in Moorestown and in her appearances on local TV programs such as NBC-10's "The 10! Show."

In Jamaica, scotch bonnets are used to season meat, fish and poultry, and they're a key ingredient in the spice mixture called jerk, which is rubbed on meat and fish cooked over an open fire.

For just a little heat, Jamaicans often drop a whole green scotch bonnet into a soup pot, where it adds flavor without making the soup overly spicy — as long as the cook remembers to take the pepper out before it gets so soft, it breaks open.

See HEAT, Page D2

Teams vie for glory in BBQ contest

2010 Backyard BBQ Challenge

What: Amateur teams will cook up their best chicken and ribs in a competition for \$2,400 in cash and prizes.

There will also be an Iron Chef category, in which teams are given three ingredients and must create a dish with them. The event is part of the Falls Township (Pa.) Family Festival, which will also include rides and games, a children's carnival, a magician, a hypnotist and live music.

When: The festival opens at 3 p.m. Saturday. Teams will turn in their first dishes for judging at 4 and awards will be handed out at 6:30.

Where: Falls Township Community Park, 9125 Mill Creek Road

Cost: Admission is free. Food will be available for purchase.

Info: www.fallstwp.com



By Betty Cichy
Staff writer

Almost every backyard chef secretly harbors the conviction that his or her barbecue is better than all the rest.

And some people don't make a secret of it at all. They're the ones who'll be firing up their grills and smokers Saturday at the Falls Township (Pa.) Family Festival, competing for prizes and bragging rights in the 2010 Backyard Barbecue Challenge.

Close to two dozen teams will compete in the contest, which will award more than \$2,400 in cash and prizes in three categories: chicken, ribs and Iron Chef.

The *Bucks County Courier Times*, sister paper of *The Burlington County Times*, is one of the sponsors of the event. It's organized by Tom Christine, the owner of Smoke'n Dudes Barbecue Co. in Bensalem, Pa., and a veteran barbecue competitor.

Christine has been the driving force behind many barbecue contests in the area, most recently Barbecue on the Farm at Shady Brook Farm in Lower Makefield, Pa., two years ago.

That contest featured one category for amateurs and another for professional teams, who competed according to rules set down by the Kansas City Barbecue Society.

This time, "it's strictly backyard guys," Christine says.

Many of the teams are made up of families and friends who are competing for the first time, which should make things interesting for both judges and spectators.

Fair visitors can watch and talk to the teams as they cook, but they won't be able to taste. (Health department regulations don't permit competitors to hand out samples.)

Watching the competitors at work is a good way to pick up some tips and techniques that might help you improve your own barbecue skills.

Besides, it's fun to see people caught up in the heat of competition.

"Everybody can relate to barbecue," Christine says.

And if the sight and smell of all that barbecue gives you a hunger you just have to satisfy, you can buy ribs, pulled pork and more from the Smoke'n Dudes truck. It's one of many vendors that will offer a wide variety of food and drink at the fair.



STEVE GENGLER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Ham n' Eggins team member Rich Driscoll of Newtown, Pa., puts the finishing touches on a dish of lamb and scallops, which was the Chef's Choice winner at the BBQ on the Farm contest held two years ago at Shady Brook Farm in Lower Makefield, Pa.

Heat

Continued from Page D1

Those who want their food even hotter can sprinkle on a little of the liquid — or even bits of pepper — from a jar of scotch bonnets pickled in vinegar and spices.

“Go into any Jamaican kitchen, and you can find a pepper bottle,” Davis says.

Native Jamaicans develop a tolerance early on for the scotch bonnet’s fire, because they grow up eating the pepper in so many dishes. But that doesn’t mean you can’t learn to love chiles later in life.

“You always start small,” Davis says. “You can always add more.”

If she wants just a bit of heat, she might use as little as a fifth or a sixth of pepper to flavor a whole dish. If her diners are a little more adventurous, she’ll cut off a bigger piece.



DENNIS MCDONALD / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
A few minutes is all it takes to make Hot and Sour Shrimp, a dish that Janet Davis created to show off the flowering power of scotch bonnet peppers.

This fiery condiment really shows off the flavor and the heat of scotch bonnet peppers. Add just a little bit — or more, if you have a strong tolerance for heat — to meat, sauces, vegetables, or anything you’d like to spice up.

Davis uses a mortar and pestle, which gives the mixture a nice chunky texture. Take care if you use a mortar to avoid splashing the mixture on your face as you mash. You could also pulse the peppers a few times in a food processor.

This hot sauce will keep for weeks or months in the refrigerator.

SCOTCH BONNET HOT SAUCE
2 dozen scotch bonnet peppers
¼ teaspoons salt
3 tablespoons white distilled vinegar

Cut peppers into quarters and place in a mortar. Add salt and mash. Place mixture in a small jar or bowl and add vinegar. Cover and refrigerate.

There’s half a scotch bonnet in this Hot and Sour Shrimp, but you could use less, or even substitute a milder pepper such as jalapeno or serrano (though it won’t have quite the same flavor). This dish, which Davis created, also contains scallions, another ingredient that’s very common in Jamaican cooking.

HOT AND SOUR SHRIMP
1 pound extra-large shrimp
¼ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons butter
Half a scotch bonnet pepper, finely chopped
2 scallions, chopped
2 cloves garlic
1 lime, halved

Peel and devein the shrimp. Season with salt.

Add butter to sauté pan and heat over medium-high heat. Add shrimp, pepper, scallions and garlic, and sauté for 4 to 5 minutes, tossing periodically.

Squeeze the lime over the shrimp and serve.



From her Jamaican roots to a life in food

By Betty Cichy
Staff writer

Though she left Jamaica more than 20 years ago, Janet Davis is still passionate about the food of her native country — so passionate that she’s built a career around it.

Davis, who comes from a food-loving family (her mother ran a small eatery in Jamaica before coming to this country in 1985), studied communications and broadcasting in college and worked for a time for Bloomberg Television in New York City.

But after her son was born, she wanted to give up her commute and spend more time with her family. So she found a way to combine her broadcast training with what she loves most: food and cooking.

In 2004, Davis started a company, Scotch Bonnets Restaurant & Catering, specializ-

ing in Jamaican food. A few years later, she recorded a series of five-minute cooking segments called “The Pepper Pot” for WYBE, a public television station in Philadelphia.

Since then, Davis has become a regular guest on morning shows on the NBC and Fox stations in Philadelphia, demonstrating Jamaican dishes recipes and offering ideas for entertaining. She also teaches classes in Jamaican cooking at Kitchen Kapers, a cookware store in Moorestown, and she shares recipes and information on her blog as well.

Davis loves to educate people about the cuisine of Jamaica, which has been strongly influenced by many different countries over the centuries. People from Spain, Great Britain, Africa and other places have stopped or settled in Jamaica and contributed their own spices and flavorings to its cuisine.

In addition to scotch bonnets, Jamaicans love to cook with allspice, which they call pimenta. It’s widely used in meat dishes, and it’s an important ingredient in jerk seasoning.

Scallions and thyme are also very popular, and red snapper is a favorite fish.

Jamaican cooks are very economical and they’ve learned to make great meals with whatever they have on hand.

“You’re not talking about a nation of rich folks,” Davis says.

That’s one reason they love scotch bonnets. Just a little bit of one of those peppers can add smoke and spice to any dish.

“To me, the essence of Caribbean cooking is the flavor,” Davis says. “More than the heat, it’s the flavor.”

Janet Davis offers recipes, information and catering menus on her website, www.scotchbonnets.com. You can also find links there to her blog and Facebook page, and you can follow her on Twitter.



Janet Davis always keeps a supply of scotch bonnet peppers on hand, and uses them to make a variety of Jamaican dishes.

Serrano pepper jelly

Find this recipe and more ideas for using hot peppers from your garden or the farmers market on food editor Betty Cichy’s blog at www.phillyburbs.com/opinions/blogs/courier_blogs/betty_cichy.html



An easy burrito with the soul of jambalaya

By J.M. Hirsch
Associated Press

One part burrito, one part jambalaya, all good.

If you want to crank the heat, splash some hot sauce onto the rice and beans, or sprinkle diced jalapeno peppers inside before rolling up the tortilla. This filling also would be good as a hearty rice dish served alongside spicy grilled chicken. Or add a quart of chicken broth, bring it to a simmer, and you’ve got a satisfying soup.

For an even more nutritious take on this recipe, substitute ready-cooked brown rice for the white rice (reduce cooking time accordingly) and use low-fat sour cream and cheese.

SPICY BLACK BEAN, SAUSAGE AND RICE BURRITO
4 slices bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces

1 small yellow onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 precooked spicy chicken sausages, cut into rounds
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
1 cup long-grain white rice
2 cups chicken broth
15-ounce can black beans, drained
1 cup jarred tomatillo salsa
Salt and ground black pepper, to taste
4 burrito-size flour tortillas
½ cup chopped fresh cilantro
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
½ cup sour cream

In a medium saucepan over medium-high heat, cook the bacon for 2 minutes, or until it lightly coats the pan with fat. Add the onion, garlic, sausages and smoked paprika. Sauté for 3 minutes.

Add the rice and cook, stirring constantly, for another 30 seconds. Add the broth and beans, stir well, and bring to a boil. Cover the pan, reduce the heat to simmer, and cook for 15 minutes.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and let cool for 5 min-

utes. Mix in the salsa, then season with salt and pepper. Microwave the tortillas for about 15 seconds to soften them. Divide the rice and beans mixture among the tortillas, then top

each with chopped cilantro, cheddar cheese and sour cream.

Makes 4 servings.

Recipe from J.M. Hirsch’s “High Flavor, Low Labor: Reinventing Weeknight Cooking” (Ballantine, 2010)

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