

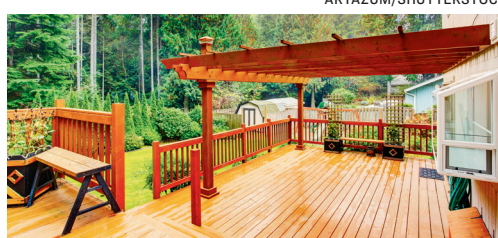
## Budgeting for Christmas

When you make a Christmas budget ahead of time, you can stop the holiday stress before it even begins.

See D7



GALYNA SYNGAIEVSKA  
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## Add Shading for Your Patio and Deck

Being outdoors on a deck on a sunny afternoon can be unbearable.

See D7

# HOME

THE EPOCH TIMES

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The harvest begins most years in late July and extends into October.



The tiny village of Hatch, New Mexico is world-famous for the chiles grown in the fertile surrounding valley.



JENNIFER MCGRUTHER

These fermented pickles are sharply sour and infused with the intense flavor of flowering dill and garlic.

## Sour Pickle Power

Traditional fermented pickles are the easiest you'll ever make

JENNIFER MCGRUTHER

This time of year, you can often find baskets of pickling cucumbers at your local farmers market. Compared to slicing cucumbers available in supermarkets year-round, this thin-skinned, stubby variety enjoys a relatively short season that lasts only a few weeks. Those few precious weeks of late summer just so happen to coincide with when dill blooms. It's a natural harmony that marks the beginning of pickle season.

You might remember your grandmother standing over a hot stove, packing cucumbers into jars with vinegar, salt, and dill before canning them in a bath of boiling water. It's a tradition that preserves the bounty of summer for use during winter's leaner months. Canning and pickling kept families fed when food was scarce due to economic challenges and food shortages. During both world wars, the federal government encouraged growing gardens and making pickles. Homemakers took up the challenge, considering it an act of both thrift and patriotism.

### Look for the freshest cucumbers you can find.

Yet, there's a tradition that stretches back much further. The first pickles, which date back to at least 4,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent, were fermented, rather than pickled in vinegar and canned.

Traditional sour pickles are made by packing them in saltwater brine and letting them ferment. This process encourages the proliferation of beneficial bacteria—the same kind you might find in yogurt or sauerkraut. As these good bacteria metabolize the carbohydrates in your cucumbers, they release an abundance of B vitamins as well as lactic acid. The lactic acid gives the pickles their sour taste and preserves them for long-term storage.

While the process may sound complicated, it's practically effortless. These are the easiest pickles you'll ever make.

### Selecting Cucumbers

Unlike the slicing cucumbers that you would find at the grocery store, pickling cucumbers have a bumpy texture and a matte green color.

Head to your local farmers market and look for the freshest cucumbers you can find. They should feel uniformly firm, free from mushy spots or wrinkled ends.

Continued on D3

# Hatch Chile Fever

Green chile season is heating up in New Mexico, where the fiery peppers are an indispensable part of the local cuisine—and daily life

Green chiles are harvested early and roasted, to be used in sauces, stews, rellenos, and beyond.



ERIC LUCAS

"First I turn the heat way up. Then I dial it back down."

Hoisting a 40-pound burlap sack of green chiles into the gas-fired roaster at Chile Fanatic in Hatch, New Mexico, Jesus Soto explained how he prepares the surrounding valley's famous peppers. The flames roared; chiles tumbled in the rotating wire cage; the thick, sharp scent spread through the store. Soto stood by the controls administering his prescription: high heat, then low.

He might just as well have been describing the quintessential New Mexico dinner: chips and salsa; flat enchiladas blanketed with green chile—the name for both the peppers and the stew made from them—and topped with a fried egg; and a moderating dessert of sopaipillas with honey butter.

These chiles are the centerpiece of the meal, which is itself the pinnacle of New Mexico cuisine, a distinctive craft in which the Land of Enchantment takes such pride in that it has adopted the slogan "Chile Capital of the World," made chiles the official state food, and designated "Red or green?" the "official state question," referring to which kind of chile diners prefer on their enchiladas. The harvest begins most years in late July and extends into October; the Labor Day Hatch Chile Festival, which is like a county fair, is the centerpiece of the season.

New Mexico State University and its Chile Pepper Institute is the world's leading institution for the study and propagation of chiles.

Continued on D2





ERIC LUCAS

# Hatch Chile Fever

Green chile season is heating up in New Mexico, where the fiery peppers are an indispensable part of the local cuisine— and daily life

High heat, then low: Jesus Soto roasts freshly harvested Hatch green chiles at Chile Fanatic in Hatch, N.M.

*Continued from D1*

Horticulturists there were responsible for breeding the varieties that kicked off the state's chile production industry in the early 20th century.

Today, New Mexico leads the United States in chile production: more than 68,000 tons a year. And while there are numerous places in the state where many kinds of chile are grown, the Hatch Valley is the capital—its 30,000 arable acres are responsible for a third of the state's production. Add in adjoining areas, and the Hatch region produces 80 percent of the state's chiles.

"The stars are all aligned right here for the best chile-growing," said local grower Keith Franzoy, who farms 60 acres of chiles. "We have the alkaline soil, water for irrigation, warm days, and cool nights chiles need. I know I'm biased, but ... ours are the best."

In a broad floodplain along the Rio Grande a half-hour north of Las Cruces, thunderheads built over the Black Mountains in the northwest distance and columns of rain sent pearlescent shafts to the ground. In the fields, lush green plants drooped with heavy loads of chiles—thick-walled varieties for harvesting green and roasting, and thinner Sandia types that'll ripen to rubies and be dried for ristras, chile powder, and just plain decoration.

Franzoy is a descendant of the first family to begin growing chile commercially in the valley. Ironically, his great-grandparents were from Austria, immigrants who left Europe in 1917 to escape the ravages of World War I. At first, they thought the hot chiles their neighbors grew in backyard gardens were dangerous (a sentiment first-time chile tasters often still feel today). But Joseph Franzoy and his family grew to love the chiles, began to produce and sell them in the valley, and initiated an industry.

## Chiles of the World

Those first chiles were what are called land-race varieties, a term referring to crop types that people develop by saving seeds and adapting them to their specific growing area.

"Chiles and chile seeds were no doubt traded up and down the Rio Grande Valley for centuries among indigenous peoples, then Hispanic settlers," said Stephanie Walker, an associate professor at New Mexico State who came to New Mexico as a child and has spent her entire adult life studying and adapting chile varieties. "The distinctive chiles so familiar today date back to the early 20th century."

Now, she noted, "I can't imagine daily life without chile."

In the world, there are literally thousands of chile types. They originated in Mesoamerica and spread rapidly across the globe after Christopher Columbus brought New World foods back to Europe. In Africa, southern Europe, Asia, and the Pacific, backyard growers did their own breeding, just as New Mexico growers did.

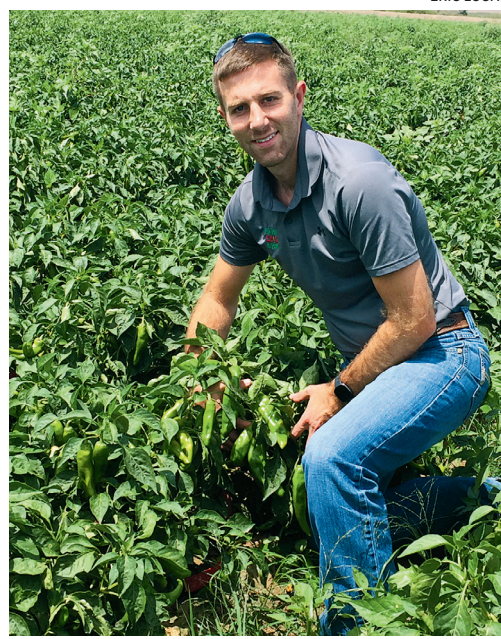
Of those thousands of chile types, the ones

“The stars are all aligned right here for the best chile growing. We have the alkaline soil, water for irrigation, warm days, and cool nights chiles need.”

Keith Franzoy, chile farmer

“People will order 250 pounds, invite friends and family, throw a party in their backyard, and roast the chiles.”

Preston Mitchell, owner, The Hatch Chile Store



ERIC LUCAS

Preston Mitchell stands in a field of Charger chiles. His company, The Hatch Chile Store, ships Hatch chiles and chile products across the country and around the world.

that form the backbone of Hatch pepper production are called—surprise—“New Mexican pod” varieties, and the original types have been supplemented often with new cultivars developed at New Mexico State.

Chile farming today is vastly different from a century ago. Most of the fields have buried drip irrigation that feeds steady moisture to the plant roots. A six-year rotation schedule fends off soil-borne diseases; when they aren't growing chiles, Hatch farmers produce alfalfa, onions, and cotton, among other crops.

The Hatch Chile Association has obtained a federal type certificate and a trademark for chiles grown there. But there's more than one kind of “Hatch chile,” ranging from modern mild types to older, hotter varieties. Charger chiles, a medium-hot favorite grown to be used green, can range from 500 to 3500 on the Scoville scale (which extends past 1 million for ghost peppers and such); Big Jims are milder, Anaheim-like; Sandias are hotter and grown for ripening; Lumbres are hotter still, and the list goes on.

And if the list of thousands of chile varieties, all with different shapes, colors, flavors, and levels of heat, isn't complex enough, consider that all of those chile types produce fruits that vary from plant to plant—sometimes from pod to pod on the same plant.

## Hooked on the Heat

I taste-tested this in a field of Charger chiles with Preston Mitchell, another Franzoy descendant who helped build Hatch's chile fame with his company, The Hatch Chile Store (Hatch-Green-Chile.com). Mitchell's business has no storefront. Instead, the company ships chiles (fresh, roasted, and dried) and value-added chile products across the country and around the world. On assignment in Australia for two years and miss green chile? Mitchell's workers will get it to you. Rellenos, powders, and canned chiles are all available through the wonders of modern commerce.

In one of the fields from where he buys chil-

es, Mitchell handed me a green pod as pretty as an emerald. I broke it open and took a bite: It had a mild, juicy, and slight acrid aftertaste. Then I tried one that was already crimson ripe: Now there's a sharp bite of capsaicin, the alkaloid that gives chile its heat. I smiled. The deep color; full-bodied, citrusy juice; and earthy after-taste are lush and evocative.

"We provide people a connection to happiness," Mitchell said of his business, which ships 2 million pounds of chiles per year. "People will order 250 pounds, invite friends and family, throw a party in their backyard, and roast the chiles."

My introduction to green chile came on my 18th birthday at a long-gone restaurant in Albuquerque's North Valley. The restaurant was an old territorial adobe set amid autumn-gold cottonwoods along the Rio Grande; the evening light was butterscotch; the breeze lifted the day's warmth into the trees. My girlfriend, a New Mexico native, ordered for me—that quintessential plate of flat enchiladas with green chile and an egg on top.

My palate sizzled with capsaicin. Sweat poured down my face. Endorphins fizzed in my veins like butter. It was the start of a lifelong love affair, and chiles have been a constant in my diet ever since. I grow my own and hang a ristra of dried New Mexico chiles in my kitchen as a key ingredient in winter stews—it's marvelous with lamb, for example.

"Once you get hooked, you can't get unhooked," declared Keith Franzoy, whose family and friends around the country require him to ship them chiles. "It's an addiction, but it's a good one."

*Eric Lucas is a retired associate editor at Alaska Beyond Magazine and lives on a small farm on a remote island north of Seattle, where he grows organic hay, beans, apples, and squash.*

## GREEN CHILE STEW

"You don't need chicken soup. You need green chile," I was told the first time I had a cold in New Mexico, years ago.

With huge amounts of vitamins A and C, many immune boosters, and anti-inflammatory properties, chiles are a superfood. The American Heart Association reported in 2020 that regular chile consumption was associated with a 26 percent reduction in cardiovascular disease mortality, a 23 percent reduction in cancer mortality, and a 25 percent reduction in death overall. Can chicken soup do all that? And cure the common cold?

My recipe for green chile (New Mexicans don't say "stew," as it's inherent in the term "green chile") is adapted from those used by generations of cooks I learned from in New Mexico and Colorado. Adjust it as you like, but I strongly urge no skipping on the garlic, cumin, or chile—you wouldn't order a cappuccino without coffee or milk, would you?

- 1 pound fresh green chiles (not Anaheims)
- 2 tablespoons lard or vegetable oil
- 1 headstrong garlic (hard neck purple or red, not white), minced
- 2 medium yellow onions, diced
- 1 pound pork steak, shoulder, or (fancy version) tenderloin, diced into half-inch cubes
- 1 tablespoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon dried sage, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, or to taste
- Water or chicken stock
- 1 to 2 tablespoons cornstarch

Broil the chiles in the oven for 10 minutes on each side, until lightly charred blisters appear. Remove from oven, cover with a damp cloth, and let steam until the skins loosen. Peel the skins and dice.

In a large stockpot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat, lightly caramelize the garlic and onions in the lard or vegetable oil, about 10 minutes. Add the pork and brown, about 20 minutes.

Add the peeled and diced chiles to the pork, along with the cumin, sage, oregano, salt, and pepper. Add enough water or chicken stock to cover, bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 30 minutes.

Thicken the stew with cornstarch as desired, and taste to adjust seasonings. Serve with fresh corn tortillas and ranch beans—blue corn is traditional, but yellow, red, or white are OK.



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Roasted green chiles are the star of this iconic New Mexico stew.