



Milaeger's

Hot Peppers---a new world record!

Kevin Milaeger

Breaking news!---The title of "world's hottest pepper" has now been claimed by a newcomer called 'Carolina Reaper.'

For many years the habanero was the world's hottest pepper. Which variety of habanero is not certain, for there are many types---possibly 'Caribbean Red' is the hottest. But several years ago the 'Ghost Pepper' appeared on the scene. It was several times hotter than any habanero. The 'Ghost' was surpassed by 'Trinidad Scorpion' (Butch T strain), and now this year we have the



Carolina Reaper



Ghost Pepper

'Carolina Reaper,' with a heat rating of just under 1.5 million Scovilles. We are growing all three, plus some others that are extremely hot, such as 'Fatali.' Of course, we'll have plants of all of these this spring. You can make your own judgment, or you can join us at Milaeger's Tomatomania in September, and try all of our hot peppers.

The Scoville rating system is based on how much water it takes to neutralize the heat of a pepper. If you have one drop of 'Carolina Reaper' juice, it takes 1.5 million drops of water to neutralize it so that no heat is detectable. A sweet bell pepper has zero Scovilles (sometimes referred to as Scoville units). Jalapeno peppers range from about 2,000 to 5,000 Scovilles. Habanero peppers range from 250,000 to 450,000 Scovilles.



Caribbean Red



Dave Milaeger with Carolina Reaper

These hot peppers are developed primarily by hobbyists, so the source for seed can be somewhat unreliable. This is why we grow our own plants and collect and process our own seed, having secured the original plant from a reliable source. While all of our plants have traditionally been grown from seed, this year we are trying some vegetative propagation. We have about fifteen stock plants of 'Carolina Reaper,' and we've been taking cuttings regularly. We'll sell some of the big stock plants this spring, and of course we'll be offering smaller plants from seed and cuttings, too. Here is what the stock plants look like now.

You might be interested in our seed collection process---it can be quite an ordeal. These hot peppers are slow to reach maturity. We pick them at the end of summer, and by then the plants are huge and there are usually hundreds of peppers on each plant. They are quite a sight, as you can see in this photo of the Scorpion pepper. In a really hot summer, the plants will be even bigger and more productive, and the peppers will be hotter. Once the peppers have turned from green to orange, red, or yellow, we harvest them and spread them out in open trays, in a greenhouse. After they have dried for a week or so, we cut them in half and arrange them open side up in the same trays. We let them sit like this for several weeks, drying out so the seed doesn't spoil.



Trinidad Scorpion



Trinidad Scorpion

Then we carefully scrape out the seed and store it in vials in a refrigerator that we keep at 38 degrees. There the seed is perfectly safe until we sow it the following February. Most importantly, all of this seed processing is done in a greenhouse, right in front of a large greenhouse fan that pulls the fumes out and away from our staff. Most people can't tolerate inhaling the pepper fumes---it can get into one's sinuses and cause great discomfort. In addition, staff members wear at least one pair of gloves any time they handle the peppers or the seed. We have experienced instances where the pepper juice has seeped into their hands and they could feel the heat in their entire body for a day or two.

You might wonder why anyone would want such a pepper. It's madness to me, but there are many "pepper heads" out there who just can't get enough of the heat. Some like it hot, others not so much. At Milaeger's, we have something for everyone---57 types of peppers in 2013!

Please feel free to [email me](#) with any questions or comments.



Fatali