
Capsicum (sweet pepper)



Market requirements

Varieties: Most popular: Californian Wonder
Also popular: Florida Highbush

Standards: EEC regulations stipulate the following standards for sweet peppers of the cultivars grown from *Capsicum annum* L.:

- whole
- fresh in appearance
- sound (produce affected by rotting or deterioration such as to make it unfit for human consumption is excluded)
- clean, practically free of any visible foreign matter
- well-developed
- free of damage caused by frost
- free of unhealed injuries
- free of sun-scorch (Class II allows sun-scorch or healed injuries not exceeding 1 cm² or 2 cm in length)
- with their stalk
- free of abnormal external moisture
- free of foreign smell and/or taste

Over and above these requirements, Class I must be:

- firm
- of the normal shape, development and colouring for the variety, with due regard to the degree of ripeness
- with their stalk, which may be slightly damaged or cut, provided the calyx is intact
- virtually free of blemishes



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Class II may show the following defects:

- shape and development
- sun-scorch and healed injury
- slight dry superficial cracks not exceeding an overall cumulative length of 3cm
- less firmness, without being withered

Size: A variety of sizes are sold in the UK, with each buyer defining requirements in detail. The catering trade prefers an average 80mm. The EEC lays down minimum sizes: for Class I the width of sweet peppers may not be less than:

- elongated sweet peppers (tapering): 30mm
- square blunt sweet peppers: 50mm
- square tapering sweet peppers (peg top): 40mm
- flattened sweet peppers (tomato): 55mm

For sized sweet peppers, the difference in diameter between the largest and smallest sweet pepper in the same package may not exceed 20mm. Tolerances of 10% of weight or numbers of peppers not conforming to the sizes within a margin of +/-5mm, including not more than 5% below the minimum size.

For Class II sizing is not compulsory, providing minimum sizes are observed. For sized peppers, tolerances are defined as for Class I, but for unsized peppers, 5% by number or weight are allowed to be up to 5mm smaller than the minimum size laid down.

Shape: Variety of shapes acceptable, but must be uniform, with stalk, and intact calyx.

Colour: Red, green or yellow, free of blemish. Green is the most common but red is becoming increasingly popular

Ripeness: Firm with no withering

**Taste &
Texture:** Firm, crunchy, juicy

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Getting to market

Harvesting, Handling and Storage

If capsicum are to be sold as green sweet peppers, they should be picked at a specific point in their development, when the fruit changes from a matt, wrinkled appearance to being darker green and shiny. If picked prior to this point, they do not travel well. If left beyond this stage, they are best left on the plant until a fairly uniform red, which occurs over a period of up to six weeks. They can then be sold as red sweet peppers. They can be hand-picked, breaking the stalk from the stem, or cut with a knife, scissors or secateurs. Care should be taken not to break the stem, which tends to be more brittle in the early morning, so picking at this time should be avoided. Plants should be picked over once or twice a week, when the weather is cool and dry.

Capsicum should be cooled quickly to reduce field heat, in a situation with good air circulation. They should be transported and stored at temperatures of 7-9°C for green peppers and 4-6°C for red peppers, with relative humidity of 90-95%. In ideal conditions, peppers can be kept for between 10 and 30 days, though this varies between cultivars, with California Wonder having a maximum storage time of 14 days and Danube one of between 20 and 25 days.

Packaging

For import, the preference is for jumble packed (loose) capsicums in 5/6kg boxes, ventilated and with full lids. They may be retailed overwrapped or in bags, though loose is most common. Packing in contact with the capsicum must be new, clean and, if printing or labelling has been used, inks and glue must be non-toxic. Each package must be marked with:

- country of origin
- the nature of the produce if not visible from outside, including the commercial type (shape)
- colour, if not visible
- class
- weight or numbers

It is also advisable to include:

- the name of the distributor and/or packer
- size
- date of packing

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Handling information can also be included, giving temperature guidance, fragile and side-up symbols.

Branding and Promotion

There is little generic promotion, and brand names, although used, do not appear to be important. Capsicum are, however, promoted under the general banner of Dutch vegetables, which have a reputation for excellence in the market, and the Dutch have also been advertising their development of new colours, eight of which are now available. In order to compete with this produce, exports to the UK must match, and be promoted as matching, the quality of Dutch capsicum. Produce should therefore be clearly and attractively labelled.

Import Regulations

Capsicum come under tariff number 0709 60 10 and tariffs in force are as follows:

Full tariff:	9%
GSP countries:	9%
ACP countries:	Free
Turkey:	Free
Least developed developing countries (LDDC):	Free
Canary Islands, Israel:	3.4% (subject to quota)
Morocco, Tunisia:	3.4%
Cyprus:	3.2% (subject to quota)
Malta:	5.4%
Lebanon:	5.4% (full rate 1 May-14 Nov)
Egypt, Jordan:	3.4% (1 Mar-30 Apr and 15 Nov-31 Dec)
	Full rate other periods

In order to receive preferential tariff treatment, produce must be accompanied by the appropriate forms: EUR 1 for ACP countries or Form A for least developed developing countries (LDDC). Certain hygiene standards must be met and all fresh produce entering the EEC must be accompanied by the original of a phytosanitary certificate (See Appendix 1).

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When to sell

Timing

The summer months of May-October are well provided by the European producers, including the UK. The Netherlands provides supplies for two months either side of this. Cyprus also exports to the UK over this period. The Netherlands and Spain are the dominant suppliers, each providing around 40% of the market. There is less competition in the winter months, despite the following exporting to the UK:

Canary Islands:	October-June
Israel:	October-March
Spain:	October-April

Although Spain is a major supplier in terms of overall volumes, there is currently a significant gap in January and February, when buyers are unable to obtain the quality of capsicum desired in sufficient quantities. This applies to both red and green capsicum, but is particularly the case for red capsicum.

Wholesale prices reflect this seasonality, with average wholesale prices for 1989/90 being 126 pence per kg for green peppers and 158 pence per kg for red peppers. Red pepper prices show greater fluctuation than green pepper prices, but on the whole remain higher than those for green peppers. Both went below 90 pence in June/July and have gone as high as 400 pence per kg for red and 220 pence per kg for green in winter months. Usually January/February are the months showing highest prices, but in 1990 prices continued to rise through March and April.

Market Trends

Capsicum now represent a very large volume market, with annual imports of over 40,000 tons, having grown over 200% in the last decade. Total annual retail value of capsicum sold in the UK is estimated at around £80 million. Capsicum are a very versatile vegetable, important in the catering market and used by consumers in salads, in stir-fry cooking, or stuffed and baked. Some retailers capitalise on particular markets by selling mixed packed vegetables for specific purposes. The main prospects for growth are in the new colours being introduced to the market and for red capsicum sales in winter months.