

# Early uses of chili peppers in Mexico

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This photo shows the vessels that tested positive for *Capsicum*. Each vessel had a culinary use. Credit: Roberto Lopez and Emiliano Gallaga Murrieta

Chili peppers may have been used to make spicy beverages thousands of years ago in Mexico, according to new research published November 13 in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Terry Powis at Kennesaw State University and colleagues from other institutions.

*Capsicum* species are usually referred to as chili peppers, and their uses are well known in the history of Spain and Portugal. There are relatively

few sites in Mesoamerica, Central America, and South America that contain remains of *Capsicum*, and therefore, we know little about how groups such as the Mayans and the Mixe-Zoquean, inhabitants of the site studied here, used chili peppers in those regions.

In this study, the authors used chemical extractions to reveal the presence of *Capsicum* residues in pottery samples from a site in southern Mexico. Some of these pottery vessels were over 2000 years old, dating from 400 BC to 300 AD.

They found *Capsicum* residue in multiple types of jars and vessels, which suggests that those cultures may have been using chili peppers for many different culinary purposes. For instance, *Capsicum* was found in a vessel called a sprouted jar, which is used for pouring a liquid into another container. The authors suggest that chili peppers may have been used to prepare spicy beverages or dining condiments. Powis elaborates, "The significance of our study is that it is the first of its kind to detect ancient [chili pepper](#) residues from early Mixe-Zoquean pottery in Mexico. While our findings of *Capsicum* species in these Preclassic pots provides the earliest evidence of chili consumption in well-dated Mesoamerican archaeological contexts, we believe our scientific study opens the door for further collaborative research into how the pepper may have been used either from a culinary, pharmaceutical, or ritual perspective during the last few centuries before the time of Christ."

**More information:** Powis TG, Gallaga Murrieta E, Lesure R, Lopez Bravo R, Grivetti L, et al. (2013) Prehispanic Use of Chili Peppers in Chiapas, Mexico. *PLoS ONE* 8(11): e79013. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0079013](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0079013)

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