



**PRESS RELEASE**  
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***A PEPPER FOR EVERY POT***  
**NEW EXHIBIT AT THE U.S. BOTANIC GARDEN**

**June 21, 2007 - Washington, DC** -- A new exhibit cosponsored by USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) has opened at the U.S. Botanic Garden (USBG). Featuring colorful pepper plants grown by USBG horticulturists and the research work of ARS' laboratories in Beltsville, MD, ***A Pepper for Every Pot*** will remain on display in the Conservatory's Plant Exploration room through November 12.

Pod-type peppers (*Capsicum* spp.) have long been an important agricultural crop in subtropical regions, and many different varieties can be found in cuisines around the world. Nowadays, however, peppers are just as likely to show up in flower gardens as in vegetable gardens. With rich colors and delightful shapes, they have become a commercially successful ornamental crop. ***A Pepper for Every Pot*** explores the diversity of peppers, including many recently introduced varieties, and celebrates peppers' beauty, flavors, and nutritional benefits.

ARS scientists were first drawn to peppers research and development because so much genetic diversity exists in the *Capsicum* genus for fruit and leaf shape, size, and color as well as plant habit. As a result, ARS has bred a number of new peppers that are -- or soon will be -- available. One new variety will make a great ground cover, shading out weeds with black leaves, purple flowers, and red fruit. Another new pepper, developed to celebrate Halloween, has black foliage and orange pumpkin-shaped fruit! In addition, the 'Black Pearl' variety has black foliage and shiny black fruits that ripen to bright scarlet. And for the cook, the peppers have a hot bite. With today's smaller urban gardens, peppers such as 'Black Pearl' that do double duty as both ornamental and culinary plants fill a new niche.

Besides being both pretty and tasty, peppers have important nutrients. For example, ARS scientists are researching the biochemistry of the anthocyanins that give 'Black Pearl' fruits their deep black color and protection against strong ultraviolet sunlight, and they have found that when consumed by humans, these anthocyanins function as antioxidants, providing protection from some diseases. Other improvements being researched include shorter periods from seed germination to harvest, sturdier stems, heat and drought tolerance, and excellent keeping (storage) quality. Future breeding could allow scientists to produce plants with different combinations of fruit color, leaf color, form, sturdiness, and nutritional qualities.

The U.S. Botanic Garden Conservatory is open to the public, free of charge, every day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Conservatory is located at 100 Maryland Avenue SW, on the west side of the U.S. Capitol. Our National Garden's summer hours are 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day. Visitors are welcome in Bartholdi Park from dawn to dusk. Visitors are encouraged to take Metrobus and Metrorail. Further information is available by calling 202-225-8333 or visiting [www.usbg.gov](http://www.usbg.gov).