



HOT STUFF



For those who like to spice up their winter meals with chilli, it's not too late to have them growing at home. In Adelaide the plants flower and set their best chillies from November through to June, well beyond what you'd expect of warm temperate and tropical plants. They really lend themselves to container culture for three to five years but I replace them after that. They have a small root system and grow best when the potting mixture temperature is higher than the air temperature, easily achieved with black poly pots.

Chilli aficionados grow them for the hot rush you get when you eat them or foods prepared with chillies in them. That heat scale has been described as the Scobie Heat Unit (SHU). While that scale runs to 300,000 SCU for the hottest chillies, as a matter of

convenience it is usually described on a one to 10 scale, with a few varieties, such as The Ghost chilli or Bhut Jolokai, Scotch Bonnet and Jamaican Hot being right off the scale.

A four-litre container is about as large as you need to go, or four litres per plant (shallow rather than deep), if you aim to grow several cultivars in the same pot. They are best in full sun and in winter, move the pots to the warmest aspect of the garden. In midsummer, a move to a spot where they only get morning sun will see them thrive. Use tomato fertilisers which are high in potassium but low in nitrogen. I find organic pellets just encourage leaf growth without flower and fruit set.

- *The Ghost Chilli or Bhut Jolokai (10 SHU) - far too hot for most of us*
 - *Habañero (10 SHU) - only for the brave or foolish cooks*
 - *Zimbabwe Bird (10 SHU) - a tiny chilli, but don't let size fool you*
 - *Cayenne (8-9 SHU) - many types and not all used for powder*
 - *Burke's Backyard Thai and other small Thai types (7 SHU)*
 - *Serrano (6 SHU) - widely used in spicy Szechuan cooking*
 - *Jalapeña (5 SHU) - a safe option for pizzas and widely used*
 - *Czech Black (4 SHU) - a safe chilli to use in stews*
 - *Hungarian Yellow (3 SHU) - popular in goulash and salads*
 - *Sweet Cherry (2 SHU) - ideal salad chilli or in marinades*
 - *Anabeim (1 SHU) - tastes like a bell pepper or capsicum*
- Best local supplier is Hillside Herbs on Sand Road at McLaren Vale, phone 8323-8385.*