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HOW TO SET YOUR FOOD ON FIRE:
CHOOSING THE RIGHT HOT SAUCE



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By **Erik R. Trinidad** | November 27, 2012

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Out of all the manly feats of strength and stamina out there, the spiciest is definitely the test of endurance and tolerance for the hottest hot sauce you can stand—without spitting up or running to the fridge for a glass of milk, that is. Hot sauces come in varied degrees, from mild ones—which, let’s face it, inherently don’t count as “hot” sauces—to fiery ones so volcanic that they can lead to ulcers or, more immediately, explosive cases of diarrhea. Obviously, you don’t want the latter to happen, so you can build your tolerance for digestible heat by stepping up your game incrementally from the bottom up.



Make it hot, hot, hot

A hot sauce can quantitatively be rated by the heat index based on the Scoville scale, measured in SHU (Scoville heat units). “Basically what it’s doing is measuring the capsaicin in your product,” says hot sauce expert Keenan Beasley, of Frank’s RedHot Sauce. “Capsaicin is actually the heat ingredient in peppers.”

Frank’s original cayenne pepper-based RedHot Sauce is admittedly on the lower end of the heat index, so once you’ve graduated from that grade of spiciness, kick it up a notch. Different hot sauce brands use different peppers, depending on their specific product, so regardless of brand, you should look at the ingredients. Obviously, if you’re looking at a cayenne pepper-based brand that comes in an “extra hot” variety, it’s using a higher ratio of peppers to the other ingredients than its regular recipe. To move up the Scoville scale (without changing the pepper ratio), advance to other peppers with higher levels of capsaicin in them. Thai chili peppers have almost twice the amount of SHUs than cayenne, and habaneros have triple. And if you’re daring enough—and

have built your heat level tolerance—you can try the Naga Jolokia pepper, also known as the “ghost pepper.” It’s set world records for being the hottest pepper on earth—in fact, it’s the hottest natural pepper that’s consumable before you get into the realm of pepper spray.

Hot or not?

Of course, having the hottest hot sauce you can stand is merely a test of stamina. Sure, it can impress the weak-tasted—or shall I say, “mild-tasted?”—but at a certain point, the burning sensation on your lips and in your throat and stomach lining takes away from the flavor of the food you’re eating, and thus the enjoyment of the meal. There are other trains of thought on what a hot sauce should be.

“We have a lower heat profile and a heavier flavor profile,” says Beasley, of Frank’s RedHot Sauce, which is noteworthy because it’s claimed to be the one used in the original Buffalo wing recipe when it was created over 40 years ago. “The big thing about Frank’s Red is that [it’s] the perfect blend of flavor and heat. We’re not just giving you heat that is right in your mouth, on fire. That’s not what our goal is...we’re a complement to a meal and we’re not here to overpower it.”

So whether or not you’re man enough to turn up the heat high, or merely want to add a little spice to what would otherwise be a bland meal, make sure you know which hot sauce works for you. Your bowels will thank you later.

Erik Trinidad is an author, writer, designer, food critic, world traveler, and all-around "Freelance Renaissance Man," whose work can be seen on The Huffington Post, Food Network/Cooking Channel, and Discovery.com, as well as on his own travel and food sites, The Global Trip and Fancy Fast Food. Follow him on Twitter @theglobaltrip and @fancyfastfood; on facebook.com/theglobaltrip and facebook.com/fancyfastfood; youtube.com/theglobaltrip and youtube.com/fancyfastfood and at "theglobaltrip" on Instagram.



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