

## Bang Chang Chili

Chili is considered to be a spice that has lived with Thai people for a long time. However, many people might not know that chili did not come from Thailand originally. Its origin was in Central and South America and it is one of the oldest spices in the world. There was archaeological evidence which indicated that Indians in Mexico ate chili for 9,000 years. The hard feces that were found in Huaca Prieta had a fossil of chili seeds in it. Moreover, there was a study on the lives of the Olmec, Toltec, and Aztec, which indicated that these tribes knew how to grow and consume chili as well. In addition, biologists on pre-historic botany had found fossils of chili trees more than 2,000 years old at many shrines in Peru and also chili embroidered on the clothes of Indians in Peru from 1,900 years ago.

The travel history of chili from South America to the outside world began by a Spanish man named Alvarez Chanca, the first person who brought chili into Spain in 1493. Therefore, Spanish people called it Chili, which derived from the word Chile, the name of the country that originally grew chili in South America. In 1555, the entire continent of Europe started to become familiar with chili. In 1757, a Portuguese merchant brought chili from Europe to grow in India for the first time. After that, chili spread throughout Asia. Thai people came to know about chili in the late Ayutthaya period from the Portuguese who sailed into Thailand for trading and brought the chili with them. Thai people enjoyed the spicy taste from the chili and asked for the seeds to grow. Also, the crew, who were the local people from South America, Peru and Brazil who ate chili, told Thai people that they called it "Prikka," which means hot and spicy. However, Thai people like to use a single word and called it "Prik" and found that the accent was not modern, so it was called "Phrik" up until now.





Picture: Tropical Vegetable Research Center, TVRC

Thai people have been familiar with the hotness and spiciness of chili for a long time. The charm of chili in our country, no matter the cooking method, is that it can increase the delicious smell and taste and even appetite. If you want to keep chili for a long time, people in the past chose to preserve the chili by roasting, baking, or drying in case of a shortage. Even though the chili is dried, it still gives a spicy taste.

When talking about the chili of Thai people in the past, you must think about “Bang Chang Chili” at Bang Chang Sub-District, Amphawa District, Samut Songkhram Province, due to its reputation since the early Rattanakosin era. The food for the King in the reign of Phrabat Somdet Phra Buddha Loetla Nabhalai (Rama II) used Bang Chang Chili due to its strength of a good smell, color, and mild spiciness. Later, in the present era, Bang Chang Chili was forgotten because the cultivated area had changed. There is less appropriate area to grow Bang Chang Chili. Therefore, Plant Genetic Conservation Project Under the Royal Initiation of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn was initiated. Dr. Sirikun Wasi, Researcher Expert Level of Tropical Vegetable Research Center, Department of Horticulture, Faculty of Agriculture at Kamphaeng Saen Kasetsart University, was assigned to collect Bang Chang Chili from many areas in Samut Songkhram, Nakhon Pathom, and Ratchaburi Provinces since 1992. Then they were selected and tested for their genes until getting good quality chili trees that can be grown throughout the year, which is called “Phrik Man Bang Chang TVRC365.” Its distinctive points are that when it is ripe, the stub is small and is fastened tightly with the tree. The base is big and the tip is slender with smooth skin and thick texture. The young chilis are dark green. The ripe ones are red and hard to dry. When they are dried, they will become bright red, glossy, and mild with lots of texture, big core, less seeds, and distinct smell.



Bang Chang Chili or other chilis are not only used to cook spicy food for Thai people, they are also local herbs with lots of properties, especially Capsaicin, the substance that produces the spiciness in chili, which is also a diuretic, can reduce the level of blood sugar, helps the metabolic system, increases appetite, prevents fungus and viruses, and reduces the risk of heart disease and ischemic stroke. Chili also has high Vitamin C, which can reduce the risk of cancer, prevents free radicals in the body, and strengthens collagen. Moreover, the Beta Carotene in chili can reduce the risk of cell mutation and can destroy cancer cells. The advantages of chili are plenty. Those who have never tasted or do not like spicy food might have to change their idea and try to eat this tiny chili.

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