

Paprika Guide

1. What is La Vera Paprika?

We consider “Pimentón de la Vera” (Protected Denomination of Origin) to be the product obtained by grinding the totally red crop of the strains in the “Ocales” group (*Jaranda*, *Jariza* and *Jeromín*), of the *Bola* strain, belonging to the species *Capsicum annum* L. and *Capsicum longum* L., picked when ripe, healthy, clean, with the characteristic colour of the strain, free of infestation or disease, dried over scrub and/or Holm oak wood fire by the traditional system of La Vera, these being sourced in the delimited production zone.

“La Vera Paprika” is a product with an intense, penetrating smoked taste and flavour, due to the smoke drying process the peppers undergo.

As to its colouring, it is intense red with relative shine. It has a high colouring power, which is superior among strains in the Ocales group than in the Bola strain. Its flavour, aroma and colour are highly stable in time, mainly due to the slow, gradual dehydration process applied.

The combination of the different species of peppers provide the three existing varieties of La Vera paprika: sweet, bittersweet and hot or spicy.

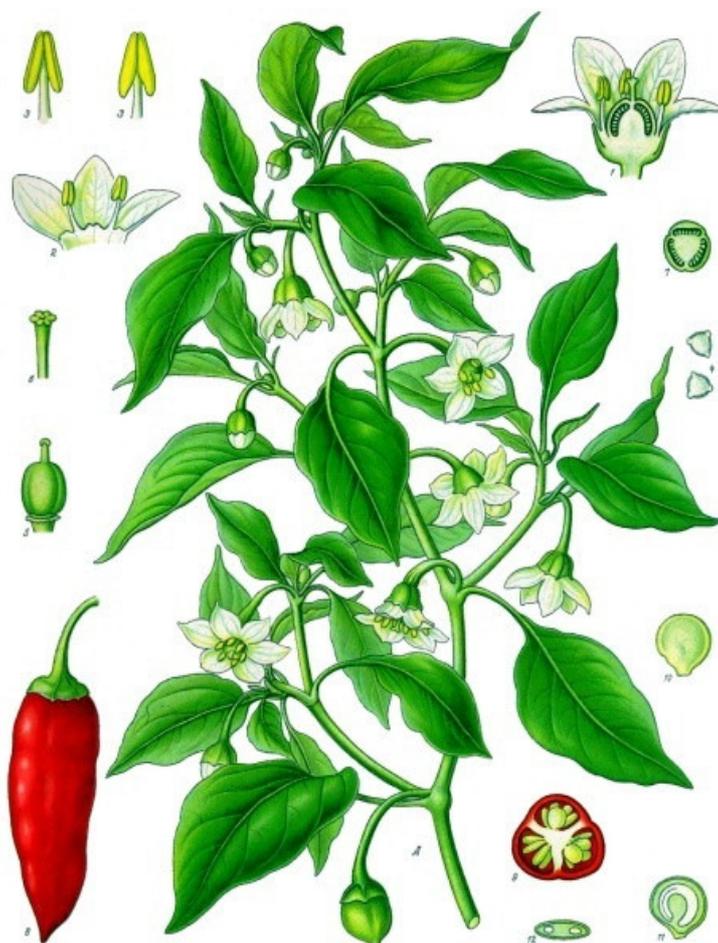
2. History

2.1. Origins

Spanish pepper originates in Bolivia and Peru where, in addition to *Capsicum Annuum* at least four other species of pepper were grown. It was brought back to the Old World by Columbus on his first journey (1493).

Large scale pepper growing was first introduced in the 16th Century by the Jerónimos monks. At that time, the Jerónimos monks had large farm lands near to monasteries such as that at Yuste, in the county of La Vera, where they planted the pepper seeds, acclimatising them to our country.

They were then distributed from Spain to the rest



Photograph 1. *Capsicum annum* L. Plant

of Europe and the world with collaboration by the Portuguese.

On the contrary to other edible plants from America, that took decades to be accepted by Europeans, the pepper spread swiftly around the world after its arrival in Spain.

Due to that expansion in the mid 16th Century, pepper plants were grown in Italy, Germany and England.

Its introduction in Europe was a culinary step forward. For the following two hundred years, it was to revolutionise Mediterranean cuisine. The pepper also transformed the cuisine of China, India and Indonesia, acclimatising to many places



Photograph 2. Monastery of Yuste

in Africa and India so swiftly that the pepper is believed to have originated in those regions.

As to its industrialisation as paprika, the little available data shows this to date back to the mid 19th Century, when the farmers of La Vera, dried the ripe crop they harvested over two piece dryers. The crop was placed at the top and a Holm oak wood fire lit at the bottom. The crop was turned over and over for fifteen days until it was fully dehydrated. Once it was dry, it was transported to the flour mills where it was ground to powder to then be sold to different traders.

2.2. Etymology

The origin of the word pepper and its derivative paprika goes back to it being introduced to the Old Continent by the expeditions led by Christopher Columbus. In spite of it being no botanical relation to pepper, which the fruit of the *Piper Nigrum*, the name stuck due to its spicy similarity in taste.

In Mexico it came to be known by the name *chile* — from the Náhuatl *chilli*. On the other hand, the term *ají* is a word from the Taíno dialect, that was spoken in the Caribbean.

The Hungarian name for the chilli pepper, *páprika*, is that given to the spice in English. This is due to traditional Hungarian cuisine using a lot of this spice and the Hungarian name has spread due to this.

In Portuguese, the spice is named *colorau* and many Central European languages call it *páprika*. In Italy, it is called *peperone* or *páprika*. In France,

it is known as *pimment annuel*, *piment doux d'Espagne* or *páprika*.

3. Cultivation and production

Capsicum Anuum L. and *Capsicum longum L.* are perennial herbaceous plants, with an annual growth cycle. Cultivation of the strains that produce the pepper require well drained soil and abundant presence of organic matter. They are species with moderate tolerance both of salinity in the soil as well as the irrigation water, although to a lesser extent than the tomato.

The temperature is a limiting factor for cultivation, as low temperatures also lead to smaller sized crops, that may be deformed and reduce the viability of the pollen.

The features provided by the microclimate of La Vera, due to being sheltered by the Sierra de Gredos, along with the properties of the soil, being loose with a total absence of salt, and the quality of the water used in the irrigation (also low salinity) allow the autochthonous strains to be grown with peppers that provide a peculiar taste to the paprika obtained from them.

Growing begins between the late February and early April, in seed beds, where they remain until May or June, when they are transplanted into the fields. Prior to receiving the plants, the fields undergo the preparatory tasks, consisting of tilling the hardened sub-superficial layers, removing lumps, mulching and manuring with organic and mineral substances and packing down the soil. After transplanting, abundant irrigation is provided to ensure the plants root well.

Development of the plant coincides with the summer season when it is necessary to apply different kinds of irrigation according to the hydrous state of the plant. At the appropriate moment of crop ripeness, it is harvested

After harvesting, the traditional La Vera drying process begins. This is different to the techniques used for paprika production in the rest of the world and this provides it two distinguishing features: the smoked aroma and colour stability.

Drying is a highly labour intensive task. Dehydration is performed in driers using smoke from scrub and Holm oak wood obtained from

pruning. The peppers are placed on wooden lattices at the top of the drying kilns. The drying process lasts at least 10 days to thus ensure a maximum humidity content of 15% once the drying has ended.

In addition to maintaining a constant temperature throughout the whole drying process, it is necessary to perform what is known as “rolling” the pepper, a technique that consists of turning the product over by hand daily to ensure the crop dries evenly.

The dehydration provides the aroma, flavour and colour stability. The dry peppers are transferred to the transformer industries so they may proceed to remove the peduncle and part of the seeds, prior to it being ground on traditional stone mills. Special attention must be paid to the temperature attained by the product during the milling process in order to ensure a fine, uniform paprika powder is obtained.

That paprika will be packed according to its subsequent use, in bags and tins for direct consumption, or in sacks for the food industry.

4. Quality

The quality of La Vera paprika is assured by the “Pimentón de la Vera” Denomination of Origin which is regulated by the European Union. The label issued by the Regulating Council guarantees this Denomination of Origin.



Photograph 3. Peppers growing on the plant

The physical-chemical characteristics that define La Vera paprika are:

- Particle size: it must be milled to such a degree that it passes through a sieve or screen of number 16 on the ASTM scale (1200 µm).

Analytical characteristics:

1. Humidity (máx. %)	14
2. Ether extracto on dry basis (max. %)	23
3. Gross fibre (max. %)..	28
4. Ash on dry basis (max. %):	
Total (max %)	9
Acid Insoluble (max. %)..	1
5. Colouring power (*), ASTA units (minimum)..	
.....	90

(*) At the moment of milling.

Paprika with La Vera Denomination of Origin must fulfil the quality standards established in the Regulations on Denomination of Origin and in the laws in force (Technical Health Regulations. Order of 1 September 1983. Official State Gazette 247 of 15 October).

The Regulatory Council for the Denomination of Origin supervises and certifies all the phases of the product: in the field during the cycles of planting, cultivation and drying performed by the farmer, and in the industry during the process of preparation, milling and packaging. Paprika that fulfils all the requisites established in the Regulations is packed to the set standards and bears the numbered counter-label of guarantee of origin.

The guarantee the consumer receives on buying Paprika with La Vera Denomination of Origin is that it is the authentic paprika from La Vera, with its smoked aroma and flavour and its intense red colour. Internationally, the most widely accepted method to analytically determine chilli pepper or paprika quality is that set by the ASTA (American Spice Trade Association), that establishes the ASTA degrees on the basis of the sample colour.



Photograph 4. Powdered paprika

The main quality characteristic of La Vera paprika is its colour stability. Colour stability is the property that defines the persistence of the colouring power over time. Due to natural processes, the substance responsible for the colour (capsaicin) loses activity. However, thanks to the drying process, La Vera Paprika has been scientifically proven to maintain its colouring power much longer than other products with similar origins and different preparation processes.

5. Uses

The main use of paprika is culinary, as a condiment to prepare dishes. It is a fatsoluble product and thus dissolves well in grease and oil. Its culinary use was extended worldwide after America was discovered.

Paprika has a large, extensive range of uses as a culinary ingredient. The fact of there being three varieties, with different flavours, makes it highly versatile in the kitchen. In Spain, for example, there are traditional dishes from the different regions that include paprika in their recipes. For example, *Galician style Octopus* in Galicia is a dish made of boiled octopus, which is sliced and then macerated with mixture of oil and paprika.

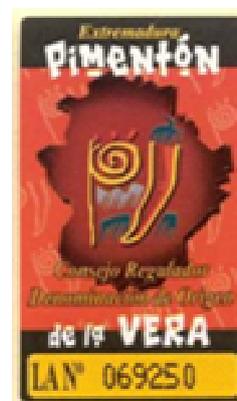
In Hungary, where paprika is a fundamental condiment, it is used in a wide variety of dishes. The most famous of all is *Goulash*, which is a spicy dish prepared with beef, onions, pepper and paprika. The name comes from the Hungarian *gulyás*, which means bull. *Goulash* is a very popular dish in Hungarian cuisine, but is

also found on the menu in neighbouring countries in Central Europe and the Balkans.

In addition to its use as a condiment for cooking, it is also used in the food industry in Spain as a natural preservative and to prepare sausages and meat preserves.

Sausages are fermented meat products manufactured by mixing minced meat, grease, salt, curing agents, sugar, spices and other additives, which are fed into natural or artificial skins and submitted to a fermentation process performed by micro-organisms. Sausage products that use paprika in their processing are called red sausage. Application of paprika to the meat treated to prepare sausages was extremely important for a long time and, due to the importance of slaughter in the traditional economy, it was called “red gold”.

Another known use is preparation of lineaments: ointments with medicinal characteristics. After rubbing these lineaments on the skin, a sensation of heat is caused due to increased blood flow in the area to which they are applied.



Photograph 5. Official label

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