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EXPERIENCE SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO

DESERT exposure

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Turning Up

By David Salcido

We've all heard the propaganda that Hatch is the chile pepper capital of the world, and for the most part we embrace that rhetoric. But when it comes to mastering the power of the pepper, you've got to go a little further south, to the hallowed halls of the Chile Pepper Institute, the Willy Wonka factory of the industry. Located on the western end of the New Mexico State University campus, the CPI is where the magic actually happens, and now true chile lovers have the option of discovering it for themselves.

Only open for a few months, the CPI's Information Center and Gift Shop is located at 113 W. Univer-

sity Avenue on the Fabien Garcia Research Center grounds, where Program Specialist April Beauchemin has tenure. A veritable fount of information, she can give you an astounding rundown of the history, science and application of the institute's 32-year reign as the focal point of chile pepper awareness. She can also introduce you to some of the hottest gift items in New Mexico.

"We only moved here the last week of September," she said, explaining the sudden appearance of the shop. "We were previously located in Gerald Thomas Hall on campus, on the second floor in the middle of the building. Parking was a huge hassle and people couldn't get to us, so when we had the opportunity to move off campus, we jumped on it. We're very happy

here, We're right on University Avenue,

so anybody driving by can see our sign, which is great. We get a lot of drop ins, which we love."

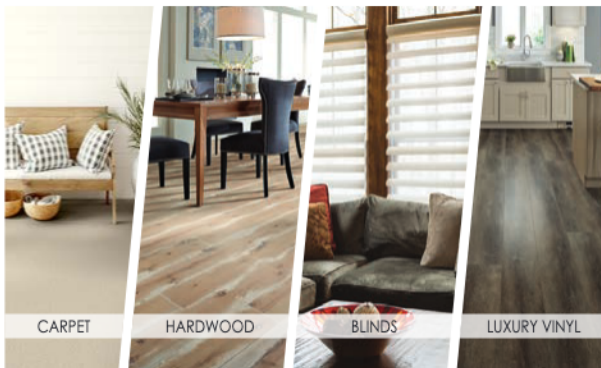
Here, April is working on making the connections between the internationally renowned institute and the community that surrounds it. Probably best known locally for their annual plant sale in April, the CPI also hosts the annual New Mexico Chile



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The Heat

Program Specialist April Beauchemin can answer all your burning questions at CPI's Information Center and Gift Shop.



platform, than we are known locally. It's been my mission to encourage local interaction, introduce people to the tours of the learning garden (which holds over 150 different varieties!) and to learn the true history of the chile pepper. There's so much more to it than people know."

She's kidding. In less than an hour she can tell you how the CPI came to exist, going back as far as 1894 when Fabian Garcia graduated from NMSU and began his standardization of the pepper

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Conference, as well as taking part in the Hatch Chile Festival, the Fiery Foods Show in Albuquerque and events at the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum. The Information Center is the next step in the recognition process.

"We get calls from the Washington Post, the New York Times, BBC, PBS, all wanting information," she said. "We have a more of a national and worldwide

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industry. She can tell you how different varieties are genetically bred, properties of the different colors, the purpose of the Scoville Heat Unit measurements, the value of the learning gardens, the art of chile tasting, and how flavor is a huge factor in the pursuit of pepper perfection.

Summing it up in one

sentence, April explains, “The research that we do here is to make chile peppers that are more palatable, more resistant to diseases, and higher yield.”

That’s right, contrary to popular belief, the purpose of the institute is NOT to create chile peppers so hot they’ll melt your face off. “As far as we know, there is no lethal dosage of capsaicin, though people sure do seem to want to reach



that,” she said with a laugh. “Being New Mexican, we like flavor just as much as we like the heat, and that’s where the research comes in.” But don’t just take our word for it.

The gift shop portion of the center features everything from several varieties of frozen roasted green chile, locally produced salsas, dried pepper powders, olive oils and salts, chile swag, and, of course, the hot sauces. Prominently featured are the award-winning, CPI-produced Holy Jolokia line, and the nationally recognized Karma sauces, which

are regularly featured on the hit YouTube show Hot Ones. Just as April pointed out, these sauces may be hot, but flavor is key.

So far, according to April, the CPI’s primary sales are all made online, but that may soon change. “We ship all over the United States. The online store has the majority of what we have here, but not everything. Our frozen roasted chile, and our fresh ristras, we don’t ship. There are some specialty items, like one-of-a-kind jewelry, that are not listed. We also have limited issue items that artists



donate to us so we can make money for the institute. Those can only be found here at the gift shop.”

To begin your exploration of the Chile Pepper Institute, you can go to the website at CPI.nmsu.edu, where you’ll find all the basic information, as well as a prominent link to the online store, and directions to the gift shop. The Information Center itself is open 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday through Friday, but these are not the only way you can become involved in the hotter than hot world of chile peppers.

“We do have memberships for the public to make donations to help support our mission of educating the public about chile pepper,” April said. “It includes a newsletter that comes out twice a year. The spring newsletter comes with free seeds – usually rare or unusual seeds – and a corresponding recipe using that pepper once it’s grown. It also talks about new developments, and events that we’re hosting or taking part in. With the New Mexican membership, you also get 15% off everything in our store. There’s all kinds of fun information there.”

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Cascabel Caramel Turtles

Our friends at the Chile Pepper Institute have a special treat for you as the new year dawns. Taken from **The Official Cookbook of the Chile Pepper Institute**, by Paul Bosland and Wendy Hamilton, it will put a smile on your face and a smoky sting on your tongue, New Mexico style!

First a few words about Cascabel chile peppers. Thought to have originated in Central Mexico, these smoky little peppers tend not to be as well known outside of the regions in



Ingredients

- 24 soft caramels
- 2 TBSPs whipped topping
- Butter-flavored vegetable cooking spray
- 75 pecan halves
- 4 oz semisweet chocolate chips
- 8 Cascabel chile peppers, dried, destemmed, deveined, deseeded, and finely chopped

Instructions

1. In a microwave mixing bowl, combine the caramels and whipped topping. Cook on 50 percent power for 45 seconds. Remove the bowl, stir, and place back in the microwave. Continue this process in 10-second increments until the mixture has completely melted and is smooth and well-blended. Let the mixture cool slightly.

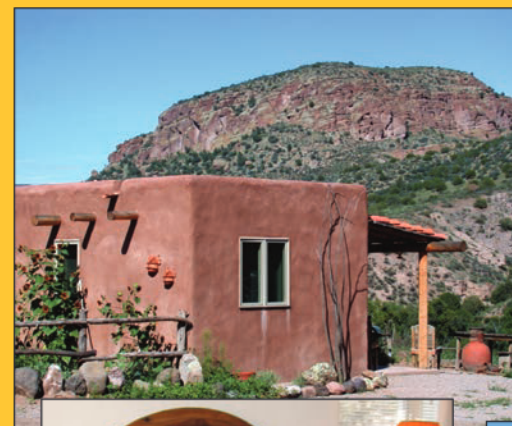
2. Spray a cookie sheet lightly with the cooking spray. Place the pecan halves on the sheet in groups of five, arranged so that each group forms a shape like a turtle's body with four legs. Carefully spoon the caramel mixture over each, leaving the ends of the pecans showing. Set aside until the caramel has hardened.

3. Place the chocolate chips in a microwave bowl. Cook in the microwave on 50 percent power for 45 seconds, remove, stir, and repeat the process in 10-second intervals until the chocolate is melted and smooth. Stir in the cascabels and let the chocolate mixture cool slightly. Spoon the melted chocolate mixture over the caramel, being careful not to cover the exposed ends of the pecans. Set aside until hard, then store in a covered container in a cool place. Yield 15.

which they are grown. Belonging to the Capsicum annum family, their pods grow to be about 1 ½ inches in diameter and are a deep garnet red when fresh, drying to a dark reddish brown. Cascabels have a slightly nutty flavor and undertones of earth and smoke, with a mild heat that adds depth and warm spiciness to a dish. Though hard to come by, samples can be acquired through the Chile Pepper Institute.



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