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The chilli so hot you need gloves

BY SIMON DE BRUXELLES

**THE world's hottest chilli pepper does not come from a tropical hot spot where the locals are impervious to its fiery heat but a smallholding in deepest Dorset.**

**Some chillis are fierce enough to make your eyes water. Anyone foolhardy enough to eat a whole Dorset Naga would almost certainly require hospital treatment.**

**The pepper, almost twice as hot as the previous record- holder, was grown by Joy and Michael Michaud in a poly- tunnel at their market garden. The couple run a business called Peppers by Post and spent four years developing the Dorset Naga.**

**They knew the 2cm-long specimens were hot because they had to wear gloves and remove the seeds outdoors when preparing them for drying, but had no idea they had grown a record-breaker.**

**Some customers complained the peppers were so fiery that even half a small one would make a curry too hot to eat. Others loved them and the Michauds sold a quarter of a million Dorset Nagas last year. At the end of last season Mrs Michaud sent a sample to a laboratory in America out of curiosity. The owner had never tested anything like it.**

According to Mrs Michaud, the hottest habañero peppers popular in chilli-eating competitions in the US generally measure about 100,000 units on the standard Scoville scale, named after its inventor, Wilbur Scoville, who developed it in 1912. At first the scale was a subjective taste test but it later developed into the measure of capsaicinoids present. The hottest chilli pepper in *The Guinness Book of Records* is a Red Savina habañero with a rating of 570,000 Scoville Heat Units (SHU).

Mrs Michaud was stunned when the Dorset Naga gave a reading of nearly 900,000SHU. A fresh sample was sent to a lab in New York used by the American Spice Trade Association and recorded a mouth-numbing 923,000SHUs. Mrs Michaud said: “The man in the first lab was so excited — he’d never had one even half as hot as that. The second lab took a long time because they were checking it carefully as it was so outrageously high.”

The Dorset Naga was grown from a plant that originated in Bangladesh. The Michauds bought their original plant in an oriental store in Bournemouth. Mrs Michaud said: “We weren’t even selecting the peppers for hotness but for shape and flavour. There is an element of machismo in peppers that we aren’t really interested in. When the results of the heat tests came back I was gobsmacked.” The couple are now seeking Plant Variety Protection from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which will mean that no one else can sell the seeds. Mrs Michaud, 48, has run the company with her husband at West Bexington, near Dorchester, for ten years. Mr Michaud, 56, has been a regular on the television chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall’s *River Cottage* series, advising on vegetable growing.

**Anyone wanting to try the Dorset Naga will have to be patient as chillis are harvested only from July on. In Bangladesh the chillies grow in temperatures of well over 100F (38C) but in Dorset they thrive in polytunnels.**

**Aktar Miha, from the Indus Bangladeshi restaurant in Bournemouth, said that even in its home country the naga chilli was treated with respect. “It is used in some cooking, mainly with fish curries, but most people don’t cook with it. They hold it by the stalk and just touch their food with it,” he said. “It has a refreshing smell and a very good taste but you don’t want too much of it. It is a killer chilli and you have to be careful and wash your hands and the cutting board. If you don’t know what you are doing it could blow your head off.”**

**Scoville Heat Units**

**Pure capsaicin: 15m to 16m**

**US Police-grade pepper spray: 5m**

**Dorset Naga: 923,000**

**Red Savina habanero: 577,000**

**Scotch bonnet: 100,000-325,000**

**Jamaican hot pepper: 100,000-200,000**

**Cayenne pepper: 30,000-50,000**

**Jalapeno pepper: 2,500-8,000**

**Tabasco sauce: 2,500**

**Pimento: 100 to 500**

**Bell pepper: 0**