SCHOOL FRUIT AND VEGETABLE NUTRITIONAL PROGRAM

The Scoop on this Week's Snack!

Pick a Pepper

Shaped like a bell, I can be red, yellow, or orange. You may think I'm a vegetable but botanically, I'm a fruit. My skin is smooth and shiny with a crunchy texture. I have a tangy, sweet taste that won't burn your tongue. What am I? **A Baby Bell Pepper!**

I'm not really a baby. I'm a variety of Bell Peppers developed for our size and sweetness. Our fruit and plants are just smaller versions of Bell Peppers – we're even grown the same way. Take a bite. Do you think we're sweeter than our larger cousins?

Bell Peppers originated in South America from wild seeds dating back thousands of years. Christopher Columbus discovered them on his travels to the new world and brought seeds back to Europe where they are still popular fresh and are also dried and ground up for a spice called **paprika**.

Columbus named his plant discovery **'pepper'** which is **pimiento** in Spanish. In those days peppercorns were a highly prized spice and was the name given to all spices with a hot and pungent taste. Although not exactly accurate, since Bell Peppers are not spicy at all, the name stuck.

Believe it or not

All bell pepper plants are red bell pepper plants.

Green, yellow, red, orange - all come from the same plant. The difference? Time. Like tomato plants, pepper plants have green immature fruit and red mature fruit. Mature fruit can also be yellow or orange. We need time to develop our ruby red colour – maybe even as long as 100 days on the plant. In BC we grow year-round in warm, temperature controlled Hot Houses.

Red is best...

There's good reason to let peppers ripen to a ruby red, it give us more time to develop our sweeter flavour and richer nutrients. When green, bell peppers have 2 times as much vitamin C as oranges – ripe red peppers have 4 times as much! Eating just 1 red bell pepper gives you 100% of your daily dose of vitamins A, E and C.

Try this tongue twister...

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers;
a peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper Picked

If Peter Piper picked a peck Of Pickled peppers,
where's the peck of pickled peppers
Peter Piper Picked?

(A 'peck' is an old English measurement, it's about of a bushel, but since you can't actually pick a pickled pepper, it's all just silliness anyways!)

Soil Secrets

Soil is pretty cool. Did you know that when you have a handful of soil you are holding a living organism? Like you, each handful is one-of-a-kind. Inside a mound of dirt are secret ingredients that create life.

What is Soil? A **mixture of mineral and organic materials plus air and water**, covering a major portion of our planet's land surface. Soil is made from broken up pieces of rock, dead bugs, fallen leaves, and branches. The top layer, called **topsoil**, is made from decomposed organic materials. This is where water, plants, animals, air, and minerals mix and a plant's roots get most of its nutrients. Topsoil is important to farmers.

It takes time for soil to develop and along the way it has help...

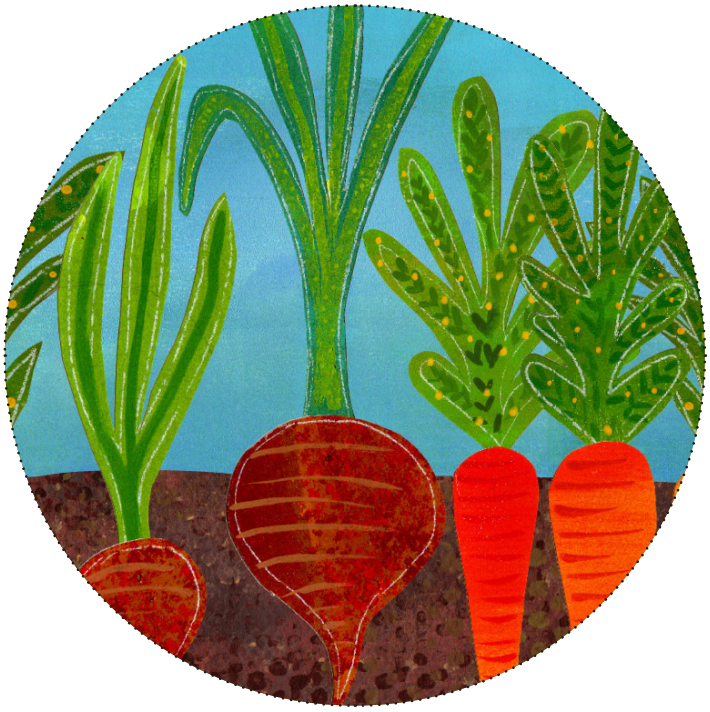
Weather and climate help form soil by breaking up rocks through changes in temperature, rain, and ice. Too much water and wind can gradually wear away the soil. Living things like insects, animals, worms, plants, and fungus help shape and enrich soil.

Do you know the secrets of soil?

True or False...

1. Soil recycles plant and animal waste.
2. Climate does not affect the formation of soil.
3. Soil acts like a filter to clean our water and air.
4. Soil is a renewable resource.
5. All land is good for farming.
6. Soil is a living organism.
7. Earthworms are good for soil.
8. Soil erosion is good for farmers.
9. Agricultural land is good for growing crops.
10. Soil is formed quickly.
11. Soil makes great mud-pies.

Answers: 1.T 2.F 3.T 4.T 5.F 6.T 7.T 8.F 9.T 10.F 11.T

Can plants grow without soil?

Yes! **Hydroponics** is a method of growing plants (like Baby Bell Peppers!) without soil. Instead, the plant's roots are suspended in nutrient-filled water. Some greenhouse farmers use hydroponics because it takes up less land space, less water, and they can grow crops year-round.