

## LOCOTO



*Capsicum annum* var. *glabriusculum*  
(Syn *Capsicum baccatum*)

[KAP-sih-kum bah-KAY-tum]

**Family:** Solanaceae

**Names:** Aji Habanero Chile, Aji Montesino, Cayenne, Cayenne Pepper, Hint Biberi, Piment Zouzeau, Piment Zouezo, Brown's pepper; Cayennepeber, Peru-peber (Danish); Hängende Paprika (German); Cayennepeper (French); Ají, Pimiento de las Indias (Spanish)

**Description:** Spreading, shrubby perennial with a height 10 feet, spread 5-6 feet. The flower corollas are white with distinctive dark green or brown spots; anthers are yellow or tan. The pods usually begin erect and become pendant as they mature, are elongate in shape, measure between 3 and 6 inches long and 3/4 to 1½ inches wide. They usually mature to an orange-red, but yellow and brown colors also appear in some varieties. The pods usually measure between 30,000 and 50,000

**Cultivation:** Requires a very warm sunny position and a fertile well-drained soil. Tolerates a pH in the range 4.3 to 8.3. This

species is a half-hardy perennial that can tolerate light frosts. Sow seed late winter to early spring in a warm greenhouse. The seed usually germinates in 3 - 4 weeks at 68°F. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots of reasonably rich soil and grow them on fast. If trying them outdoors, then plant them out after the last expected frosts and give them the protection of a cloche or frame at least until they are established and growing away well.

**History:** The *baccatum* species, familiarly termed "ají" throughout South America, originated either in Bolivia or in Peru and, according to archaeological evidence, was probably domesticated in Peru about 2,500 B.C. Extensive *baccatum* material found at the Huaca Prieta archaeological site in Peru shows that the species was gradually improved by the pre-Incan civilizations. Fruit size increased and the fruits gradually became non-deciduous and stayed on the plants through ripening. There are at least two wild forms (varieties *baccatum* and *microcarpum*) and many domesticated forms. The domesticated ajís have a great diversity of pod shape and size, ranging from short, pointed pods borne erect to long, pendant pods resembling the New Mexican varieties. The species name "baccatum" means berry-like, an allusion to the smaller-podded varieties.

**Properties:** Antihæmorrhoidal; Antirheumatic; Digestive; Irritant; Rubefacient; Sialagogue.

**Medicinal Uses:** The hot and pungent fruit is antihæmorrhoidal when taken in small amounts, antirheumatic, antiseptic, diaphoretic, digestive, irritant, rubefacient, sialagogue and tonic. It is taken internally in the treatment of the cold stage of fevers, debility in convalescence or old age, varicose veins, asthma and digestive

problems. Externally it is used in the treatment of sprains, unbroken chilblains, neuralgia, pleurisy etc.

**Culinary Uses:** Fruit has a medium to very hot pungent flavor, it is mainly used as a flavoring in cooked foods. The fruit can be dried and ground into a powder for use as a pepper-like condiment. . The pods have a distinctive, fruity flavor and are used fresh in ceviche (lime-marinated fish) in South America. They are also used in fresh salsas and the small yellow varieties are prized for their lemony aroma. The pods of all ajís are also dried in the sun and then crushed into colorful powders.

**Other Uses:** The growing plant repels insects.



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