

Roasting Red Peppers

There's more than one way to roast a pepper, and each one involves an extreme, but very specific, application of heat. The idea is to scorch the skin enough for it to balloon away from the flesh so that it slips off easily. Take it further and the pepper itself goes under fire and you end up with a charred, flaky mess. (If you're roasting young, just-out-of-the-garden peppers, pay attention: They are thinner-skinned than mature peppers and require careful monitoring.) That being said, peeling a roasted pepper is basically sort of messy. But don't be tempted to avoid the mess by rinsing the skins away with running water. You'll be rinsing away the poetic reasons for roasting the pepper in the first place — that magically enhanced flavor.

Charring the Peppers

A charcoal grill and hardwood coals produce the most intoxicating flavor in a roasted pepper, but a gas grill works well too. Throw whole peppers onto a hot grill and let the skins blacken and blister uniformly, turn them occasionally with tongs. Haul them off the grill and place them in a plastic bag to cool. Indoor fire presents certain advantages—for instance, you don't need matches or wood. If you happen to have an indoor grill, we envy you. Go ahead and use it. We are also fond of letting peppers sit on an old cooling rack over a gas stovetop burner while they roast. If you try this method, roast the peppers whole, as you would over charcoal, keeping the flames from licking at the pepper too aggressively. On either a gas or electric burner, we find that the Rick Bayless Pepper Roaster grill/griddle works beautifully—and its surface is perfect for making tortillas and quesadillas as well.

Steaming the Peppers

No matter the roasting method you use, when the peppers are uniformly charred, place them into a plastic bag, where they will steam (which helps to loosen the skins) and then cool. Once they've cooled, rub and peel off the skins.

Trimming and Dicing the Peppers

Trim the tops and bottoms from the roasted and skinned peppers, then slit each one down the side and open as you would a book, so it lays flat on the work surface. Scrape out the seeds and trim away the inner ribs with a sharp paring knife. Slice the planks into thin strips, then cut the strips crosswise into 1/8-inch dice.