HEALTH BENEFITS
• Peppers are a greater source of Vitamin C than oranges.
• They are high in antioxidants, which help protect your cells from UV light and other oxidative damage.
• Red peppers are a good source of vitamin B6, which is important for maintaining healthy brain function and also supports the immune system.
• Red peppers contain more Vitamin A, Vitamin C, and Folate than green peppers.

SNACKING + COOKING TIPS
• Chop peppers with ripe tomatoes and onions. Mix with lime juice and salt. Serve with tortilla chips.
• Slice a pepper in half and stuff with rice, finely chopped vegetables, chili powder, salt, and pepper. Sprinkle with cheese and bake at 350 until the walls of the pepper are tender.
• Saute peppers with olive oil, garlic, and cherry tomatoes. Then lay over whole grain pasta.
• Peppers are easy to freeze. Simply chop and place in freezer bags. No blanching necessary.

BIOLOGY + ECOLOGY
• Peppers are categorized as either hot or sweet. The substance that makes a pepper spicy is a flavorless, odorless substance called capsaicin and is detected by pain receptors.
• Peppers are a seed bearing part of a flowering plant. This means that a botanist would categorize a pepper as a fruit. The culinary world, however, has a different definition for fruits and vegetables. A chef would categorize a pepper as a vegetable.
• Green bell peppers are not fully ripe when harvested. If left on the plant, green bell peppers change color as they become fully ripe. Common bell pepper colors include red, yellow, and orange.
• Pepper plants like growing in hot temperatures. In Wisconsin, peppers are often germinated indoors and then transplanted once the threat of frost has passed.

CLASSROOM CONNECTION - BIOLOGY: Explore the science of spiciness and the substance capsaicin in hot peppers. Check out the TED Ed video on spicy food: http://ed.ted.com/lessons/the-science-of-spiciness-rose-eveleth

CLASSROOM CONNECTION - BIOLOGY: Dissect and compare a small lunchbox pepper, a bell pepper, and a banana pepper (wear disposable gloves to avoid spreading pepper oils). Identify the number of seeds, maturity of the seeds, texture and thickness of the outer flesh of the plant, etc. Lunchbox peppers have been selected because they have a relatively high amount of flesh compared to seeds, this is an example of a preferable plant trait.
HISTORY + CULTURE
• Originally from the Americas, peppers have become a staple in most cuisines around the globe. Peppers are eaten fresh, dried (paprika and chili powder), or processed by other means (pickled peppers, salsa, and hot sauces).

• China grows the most peppers, followed by Mexico, Turkey, Indonesia, and the United States. Within the U.S, the top bell pepper growing states are California, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, Ohio, North Carolina and Michigan. The top chili producing states are California, New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona.

• Historic evidence shows peppers were originally cultivated in Central and South America. Peppers began to travel the world in the 15th and 16th centuries, when the Spanish and Portuguese took peppers back to Europe. Peppers like Thai Hot and Hungarian Wax, though cultivated in Thailand and Hungary, were developed using seeds from the Americas.

• Sweet peppers are relatively new, they became widely grown after World War II.

• Bell peppers are called capsicums in Australia, India, Pakistan, and New Zealand.

BUSINESS + ECONOMICS
• Green bell peppers are easier to grow than the more mature red, yellow, orange, or purple peppers because they can be harvested earlier. Due to the difficulty of growing colored peppers they are often two to four times the price of green bell peppers.

• Specialty peppers, such as cayenne, are able to sell for up to ten times the price per pound of green bell peppers.

• According to Business Insider, in the last 16 years sriracha, a spicy sauce derived from cayenne peppers, has increased its market share in the US 165%.

• CLASSROOM CONNECTION - BUSINESS: Assume a bell pepper plant is able to produce 10 bell peppers this growing season. If the bell peppers are harvested when they are green, the farmer will harvest 100% of her peppers. Green bell peppers will sell at the market for $2.00 per lb. If the farmer waits 2 more weeks to harvest, the peppers will ripen further to become red bell peppers but she will lose 20% of her crop due to pest damage. Red bell peppers will sell at the market for $4.00 per lb. Each pepper weighs 0.5 lb, regardless of color. Will the farmer make a greater profit if she sells the peppers after they turn red?

• CLASSROOM CONNECTION - MATH: Dissect 1 bell pepper and show the students the pepper seeds. Count or estimate the number of seeds. If all of the seeds are planted and 70% of the seeds germinate (sprout) and grow to maturity, how many pepper plants do you have? If each pepper plant produces 10 peppers, how many peppers have you grown?

BOOKSHELF
• Green is a Chili Pepper: A Book of Colors by Roseanne Greenfield Thong. Featured objects are Latino in origin, and all are universal in appeal. With rich, boisterous illustrations, fun-to-read rhyming text, and an informative glossary, this playful concept book will reinforce the colors found in every child’s day!

SOURCES:

Harvest of the Month highlights a locally available crop each month of the year in school cafeterias, community organizations, restaurants and grocery stores. The program helps children, their caregivers, and the broader community learn more about healthy, seasonal, whole-foods eating, while supporting local farms.