

RED PEPPER LYUTENITSA



The Bulgarian word lyut means, hot, pungent, or spicy. This condiment has numerous uses and is sold commercially in Bulgaria, but homemade is best. Though lyutenitsa is classically made with more tomatoes than peppers, I have also seen it made this way with a predominance of peppers. One can make a delicious evening meal of lyutenitsa spread on toast, feta cheese, and red wine. It is also served as a side dish with many meals.

- 4-5 large red bell peppers
- 1 small onion, minced
- 2 serrano chiles
- 4-5 Tbsp. tomato paste
- ¼ cup sunflower oil
- 1 tsp. salt or to taste

Roast peppers, stem and all, over the flame of a stove or on the grill; turn frequently until their skins are black. Place in a paper bag or steam for a few minutes in order to loosen the skin. Wash off the charred skin; destem and deseed. Destem and deseed chiles. Place peppers, onion, chiles, tomato paste, oil, and salt in a blender and puree until smooth. Serve with a good, crusty bread. Makes about 2 cups.

Bulgarian peppers

At the end of the growing season in Bulgaria, the open-air markets are full of shiny red tomatoes, huge pumpkins with gray-green shells, and the first fruits of the year's bountiful pepper crop. My favorite Bulgarian peppers are sweet, jewel-red peppers, wide at the top, about 5-6 inches long, and tapered to a point. These are the peppers that Bulgarians can and bottle commercially, to produce one of their major food exports, as well as those they employ to create the pepper dishes which permeate their cuisine.