

# feel the heat

Pepper purveyor Troy Primeaux of Lafayette primes pump for world record

BY WILLIAM KALEC | PHOTO BY ROMERO & ROMERO



"No one is gonna die off [a pepper] from what I know of. You might think you're gonna die, but you're not gonna die," says Troy Primeaux.

**PRIOR TO PICKING PUNGENT** peppers, "Primo" produced popular pieces in packed places using a pick. Try saying that three times fast. Not easy, huh? Now, try saying that P-laden sentence while biting into a merciless pepper cross-bred to be 400 times hotter than a jalapeño, spice so intolerable its creator equates the sensation somewhere between "cocaine and a car wreck." No chance.

Yet, ask Lafayette musician and potent hot pepper grower Troy Primeaux (whose friends call him "Primo") and he'll tell you the line of volunteers willing to do the impossible would stretch like Gumby — to clarify, that's eat the hot pepper, not tackle the tongue twister.

"It's not unlike drugs, it's that escapism," says Primeaux, who sounds like a well-espressoed Spicoli. "I guess it's a safe drug. No one is gonna die off it from what I know of. You might think you're gonna die, but you're not gonna die. And when it's all said and done and you're done having a panic attack, it's worth the ride. It's an out of body experience. You start seeing lights and your nervous system is fully engaged.

"Just put the toilet paper in the fridge, man."

Already well-known among Indie music aficionados for playing a mean guitar in the Southern rock band Santeria, Primeaux eventually married a "good girl" and traded in groupies for a garden, growing peppers that he claims are bigger superstars than he ever was on stage. The latest legend ready to set the chili cultist circle on fire is the "Louisiana Creeper," a potentially record-setting hot pepper Primeaux created by crossbreeding two already-hot peppers, and is gently nursing through its infant generational stage.

Once the plant is stabilized — meaning the pepper seeds used to grow more peppers are plucked from the sixth to eighth generation of the pepper — Primeaux thinks the "gnarly-looking" Creeper will exceed 2 million Scoville Heat Units — the measure used to quantify culinary spice.

This new creation follows Primeaux's 1.4 SHU 7-Pot Primo pepper (a cross between a Trinidad 7-Pot pepper and a Bhut Jolokia) which stirred up a tingling sensation a decade ago among the dedicated group of tongue masochists who live to eat these edible fireballs.

"The chili cultist are obsessive," says Primeaux, who sells these peppers, seeds and sauces while his better half, Kara, makes a popular line of pepper jellies. "I get emails all the time: What's your next pepper? I want it! I want it! I want it! They're the star of the show. I'm secondary. They wanna eat them, they wanna see videos of them, they want it all, man. These are rock star peppers. Their legend will live on longer than I will. I might not carry on, but my name on that pepper will carry on."

He means that literally — 7-Pot Primo is named after Primeaux, the choice of a friend and pepper expert who kept inquiring what Primeaux was going to call this thing. The details of this whole endeavor — like what he's going to name his peppers — are sort of done on the fly, considering Primeaux fell into this professional passion only after realizing that bouncing from stage to stage every night as a rocker probably wasn't conducive to a happy marriage.

With that established, though, Primeaux takes the science of breeding peppers and the quasi-art of growing them with all sorts of seriousness.

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