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The power of pepper



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Becca

And I'm Becca.

Neil

In this episode, we're discussing a food seasoning that's so popular we eat around three quarters of a million tonnes of it a year. We're talking about pepper. Do you add pepper to your food, Becca?

Becca

I do, Neil, yes. I think it's an easy way to add some spice.

Neil

Yeah, I love a bit of pepper. I **grind** pepper onto everything. Well... not everything! But I do like it. Given its popularity, it's surprising that most people know very little about pepper. Did you know, for example, that peppers are the fruit of vines often growing over ten metres high?

Becca

Our ancestors would be surprised how little we know. From ancient Greece onwards, pepper was prized as the black gold of ingredients, and explorers crossed oceans in search of it, discovering new continents along the way. In this episode, we'll get reacquainted with pepper and learn some useful new words and phrases too. And remember, you'll find a transcript for you to read along with us as you listen, on our website, bbclearningenglish.com.

Neil

OK. First, I have a question for you, of course, Becca. Although it's black pepper you're most likely to see in shops and restaurants in the UK, there are hundreds of

different varieties worldwide. But what is unusual about Phu Quoc, a white pepper from Vietnam? Does it:

- a) make people cry,
- b) taste like parmesan cheese, or
- c) cost more than gold?

Becca

Hmm. Well, I don't think it would be as expensive as gold, and I kind of want it to taste like parmesan cheese.

Neil

OK. Well, we'll find out later in the programme. Mathilde Roellinger is the daughter of Olivier Roellinger, an award-winning French chef famous for his use of spices. While other little girls of her age were sprinkling sugar on their breakfast yoghurt, Mathilde was the only girl in Paris sprinkling pepper. Today, Mathilde runs the Épices Roellinger spice shop in the Opéra area of the city. Here, customers can find a huge range of peppers, from fruity red Cambodian Kampot pepper to Borneo's Sarawak black pepper with its woody aroma.

Becca

These peppers have strong, distinctive tastes, but curiously they enhance rather than overpower the flavour of the food you're eating, as Mathilde explained to BBC World Service programme The Food Chain.

Mathilde Roellinger

It will **give a kick** and transform it, but you will still have the savour of the different ingredients. It will not disguise the other ingredients, but it will push them – it's a flavour **catalyst**. We can say in punctuation, **like it's an exclamation**.

John Launson

It's **like an exclamation mark**.

Mathilde Roellinger

Exactly.

Neil

Mathilde says pepper **gives food a kick**. To **give something a kick** means to provide it with extra stimulation or excitement.

Becca

Pepper also makes flavours more intense. Mathilde calls it a **catalyst** – something that causes another action to start or makes it happen more quickly. In fact, she says pepper is **like an exclamation mark**. Saying something is **like an exclamation mark** means it shows strong emotion or excitement – the same thing an exclamation mark does in written punctuation.

Neil

Mathilde's spice shop holds pepper tasting sessions, where she explains to customers the origin of her peppers and how they grow, changing colour as they harden in the sun. Reporter John Laurenson attended one of these tasting sessions for BBC World Service programme The Food Chain.

John Laurenson

The different colours of pepper though, as Mathilde started to say, do not correspond to the different varieties but to the **maturity** of the peppercorns and what people do to them. They're green when they're young, black when they're **mature** and dried, red when they're very **mature**. Grey pepper is an industrial creation, not a botanical one. Ground to a fine powder, it is, says Mathilde, grey dust. She's not very **keen on** that one.

Becca

The colour of pepper is not determined by the variety, but by its **maturity**. A food's **maturity** describes the stage when a food is fully grown and ready to harvest. For peppers, this is when they wrinkle and go black.

Neil

Often a peppermill is used to **grind** pepper – to crush it into powder by pressing it between two hard surfaces. This happens with grey pepper, an artificially produced pepper mix which Mathilde is not **keen on** – meaning she doesn't like it.

Becca

We've learned so much about pepper, I'll look at it differently the next time I sprinkle some on my food. OK. Neil, I think it's time to reveal the answer to your question.

Neil

Yes, I asked you what's unusual about Phu Quoc, a white pepper from Vietnam.

Becca

I answered b) because I want it to taste like parmesan cheese.

Neil

Well, you're lucky because it is in fact b) it tastes like parmesan cheese. Well done. OK. Let's recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with the phrase **give** something **a kick** – meaning to add extra thrill or excitement.

Becca

A **catalyst** causes something to start, or speeds it up.

Neil

If you say something is **like an exclamation mark**, you mean it signifies strong emotion, surprise or excitement, just like an exclamation mark does in writing.

Becca

A food's **maturity** refers to the stage when it's fully grown and ready for harvest.

Neil

To **grind** food means to crush it into powder by being pressed between two hard surfaces.

Becca

And finally, if you're **keen on** something, you like it and enjoy doing it. Once again, our six minutes are up, but remember you can find worksheets, quizzes and loads more resources to improve your English on our website, bbclearningenglish.com. See you there soon, but for now it's goodbye.

Neil

Goodbye!

VOCABULARY

give a kick

provide extra stimulation or excitement

catalyst

something that causes another action to start, or speeds it up

like an exclamation mark

used to describe something which shows strong emotion, surprise or excitement

(food) maturity

stage when a food item is fully grown and ready for harvest

grind

crush into powder by pressing between two hard surfaces

keen on (something)

like, be interested in, or want to do (something)

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