



Chimayo Red Chilies

- Chimayo, New Mexico is 25 miles north of Santa Fé, New Mexico. To the east stands the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and to the west the blue Jemez Range.
- At one end of town is the congregation of mud buildings around the Santuario de Chimayó, the most famous pilgrimage shrine in New Mexico.
- Chimayó is celebrated for two things: its “sacred dirt,” which has been credited with healing miracles over the decades, as testified to by the long lines of crutches hanging in the shrine room; and its near-sacred chile pepper. The stories of the shrine and the chile are intertwined. Pilgrims started coming here in the nineteenth century. Even today, each Easter tens of thousands of people walk up, some from hundreds of miles away. Over the years, the pilgrims who came would leave with vials of holy water, buckets of holy dirt and sacks of the local chile.
- The chile is miraculous: it is packed full of Vitamin C and it actually increases textile sensitivity of the mouth, which may be one reason it’s popular in places that have bland staples.
- With the best chile, there’s something comparable to the terroir of fine wine, and the town of Chimayó is to chile as Havana is to cigars. After centuries of selective breeding, and irrigation from a particular mountain stream, there’s an unmistakable complexity to the chiles here, a citrus tang, a depth and richness you can’t quite find elsewhere.
- Chimayó chile is a particular strain of chile that may have been brought here by Spaniards in the 1500s.
- Today, more than 56 farmers are part of the Chimayó Chile Project. Most of them farm organically, and some even use mules to plow their small fields.
- When to plant is a big issue, because the frosts at this elevation (7,000 feet) are notoriously unpredictable.

