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PREFACE

Peppers, chiles, capsicum, or whatever they are called, are a versatile crop. The new fascination with capsicum peppers is reflected in seed catalogues that now advertise more types than ever before. This increased interest can be attributed to the rich diversity that the crop has to offer. The wide variety of uses include flavouring in food manufacturing, colouring for cosmetics, and imparting heat to medicines. Some are used as ornamental plants. The dried red powder is even used to colour flamingos in zoos and koi in aquariums! These 'hidden' uses of peppers are what makes *Capsicum* a major commodity, even though it is often listed as a 'minor crop'.

In writing this book, we were faced with the dilemma as to what word to use for the *Capsicum* genus. The aetiology of *Capsicum* terminology is confusing. The italicized and capitalized word *Capsicum* is reserved for taxonomic discussion, while the lower case and non-italicized word 'capsicum' is used as a vernacular term. A common and erroneous name for the genus is red pepper. This is an unfortunate misnomer because true peppers are different plants entirely, not related to *Capsicum*, in the slightest sense. True pepper belongs to the *Piperaceae* family. In addition, the *Capsicum* genus goes by an innumerable set of common names, such as pepper, chili, chile, chilli, aji and paprika. The Spanish word 'chile' is a variation of the phonetic 'chil' sound derived from the Nahuatl (Aztec) language, whereas 'aji' is a variation of 'axi' from the extinct Arawak language of the Caribbean. Because the Aztecs did not have a written language, it is impossible to know the true spelling of the word 'chile'. In the Spanish speaking parts of Mexico, Central America, and the south-western United States, *Capsicum* is called 'chile'. In the United States, a Senator from New Mexico, the Honourable Pete Domenici, put into the Congressional Record 'the correct way to spell chile' (Domenici, 1983). Today, the word 'chile' is used for the plant and the fruit, whereas the anglicized form 'chili' is used for a specific dish of food. The state of Texas in the United States has an official state dish made with beans, meat and chile and this food is spelled chili. Thus, when someone buys 'chile powder' they are getting ground fruits of the *Capsicum*