

Husband and wife team Kobi and Ofra Ziv-Av live and work in the sweltering conditions of Israel's Arava Desert where they are turning their passion for fiercely hot peppers into a viable business by learning how to market their new hybrid creation - the Arava Scorpion. At www.freshfruitportal.com we spoke with the pepper aficionados to find out more.

Kobi can wander around his greenhouses, pick a freshly-grown Arava Scorpion pepper from the plant and eat it whole, without even flinching or breaking into a sweat.

While others approach with caution, tentatively trying a slither of his new pepper creation, he happily chews down on this hot new variety named after the desert where it has been grown.



Cultivating peppers has been Kobi's career and he's mastered the art of nurturing the crop in arid, desert conditions, living the contented life of a small-scale farmer making a comfortable living by growing and selling the Habanero variety, and raising his six children.

Recently though as a kind of experiment, he began to work on creating a new variety that could rival the well-known Trinidad moruga scorpion, the variety that was considered to be the most piquant and pungent chili pepper around until the Carolina Reaper came along to take the Guinness World Records title in the 2012.

"I'm just a farmer, I'm no scientist," he told us.

"But I know good peppers and what we have here is a very, very hot variety that we like to call the Arava scorpion. It's so hot most people can't stand it but for me and other people who have a good palette, it's delicious.

"My life's work has been in growing peppers, starting off with sweet varieties then onto hot ones and now we have made this discovery, it's wonderful."

The Arava scorpion came about after crossing some seeds of another variety with the orange Habanero and this year has been the first time the Israeli farm has successfully cultivated a batch of around 100kgs (220.4 lbs).

"The first time I tasted it was like 'wow that is good' and we were both extremely pleased with it. Now we will introduce our Arava scorpion to the world to see what people think.

"I've had enquiries from people all over the place who want the seeds but I can't supply

seeds yet because they haven't been stabilized. Maybe in two to three years time they will be, but for now, I can send out samples."

Sample products, including a powdered Arava scorpion and fresh peppers, have been distributed to potential buyers in South Africa, Nigeria, the Netherlands and Russia who will trial the produce.

"I know there is a trend right now going around the world concerning people who enjoy very hot peppers. We are sending the powdered product samples to several countries as a trial and then we will have some negotiations and I hope it will turn into something.

"The international trend is not only for fresh peppers but for powdered products. So we take all of the water out of it and make a powder to be used in cooking; this is what the people want, I understand.

"We are learning how to market and speak with people about our peppers because up until now, we have just grown and sold on a small scale. The interest from other countries is very exciting.

How hot is hot?

The Scoville scale officially rates the pungency or spicy heat of chili peppers and is named after its creator, the American pharmacist Wilbur Scoville.

Scoville heat units (SHU) are given by measuring the capsaicin, the active component of chili peppers. For instance, the bell pepper rates at zero, whilst the Trinidad moruga scorpion rates up to two million SHU.

"The Scoville people have two samples from us and they told me, although it's not official, what they have is around 800,000 to one million using the Scoville measurement, but that has to be authorized and I have no paperwork yet but am hoping to find out the proper measurement in a few weeks," Ziv-Av said.

"Everyone wants to know just how hot the Arava is but to me I don't believe you can make that much of a difference between let's say 600,000 and one million. What is important is the quality of taste and our pepper has a very good taste that you feel like an explosion in your mouth.

"The Habanero and this new variety of Arava scorpion both like to grow in the extremely hot temperatures we have here in the Israeli desert and the large amount of light we get. I



believe this makes our peppers taste better."

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