

Pimientos

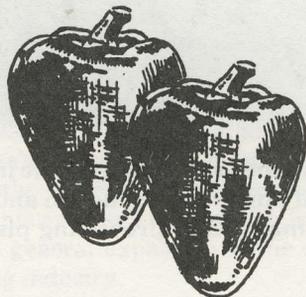
Although pimientos are no longer considered a common Georgia crop, the state once led the nation in production of this red, mild pepper. Because of this accomplishment, it once was proposed that Georgia be nicknamed the "Pimiento State" rather than the "Peach State".

Pimientos, native to America, are said to have been found growing by Christopher Columbus on his visit to the New World. The explorer brought seed from this plant back to Spain, where it became known as "pimienta," the Spanish word for pepper.

While the Spaniards were responsible for popularizing and developing ways to process these sweet peppers, a curious Georgia truck farmer is credited for reintroducing them to America.

It all began in 1911, when Spalding County farmer George Riegel saw a can of Spanish pimientos on a grocer's shelf. After purchasing and sampling a few cans, Riegel realized that Spain's product was far superior to the pimiento-type peppers he previously had grown from seed obtained in Philadelphia.

As commercial vegetable growers, Riegel and his family worked to improve the quality of various vegetable crops, and particularly were interested in peppers. The Riegels were able to secure a small package of seed through the American consul in Spain. In 1912, they grew enough plants to set out one and one half acres of peppers on their farm. From this initial planting, a single plant was selected which produced a fruit so perfect in



size, shape and color that it appropriately was called "Perfection." Seed from this plant were utilized to make subsequent plantings.

The Riegels not only improved the pimiento by establishing a new variety, they also initiated commercial processing of the crop. Because pimiento skins are so tough, fresh marketing of the vegetables proved unsuccessful. Since Riegel initially had become interested in peppers as a canned product, he decided to pursue canning the vegetable.

In the beginning, Mark Riegel removed the pepper skins by immersing them in a lye solution, then preserving them in salt and vinegar before canning. This proved to be a tedious process. Through Riegel's contacts in Spain, he learned that skins were removed by roasting pimientos in a hot oven for a few minutes and wiping off the