PLANT FACT SHEET

Bixa orellana L.

GENUS *Bixa* **FAMILY** Bixaceae

COMMON NAMES Bixa

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Seeds, Spice, Leaves

The seeds are fried gently and used as a food colouring. It colours butter, margarine, cheese, chocolate. It is ground and used as a spice (Annatto) in South America.

DESCRIPTION

An evergreen tree. It grows to 10 m high and spreads to 3 m across. The stem is erect and it is intricately branched giving the tree a crown which is spreading and graceful. The leaf stalks are long. The leaves are alternate and simple. They are broad and heart shaped. They taper to the tip and have long leaf stalks. The flowers occur in a branched flower stalk. Several of these occur at the ends of branches. The flowers are open and cup-shaped. They can be pink or purple and 5 cm across. The fruit are hairy or bristly and heart shaped capsules. They are 3 cm long. They have a soft red skin. They can be yellow. When they are ripe they turn brown and split open. The capsules contain many dark red seeds.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It suits hot humid tropical and subtropical climates. It needs a temperature above 16-18°C. It is drought and frost tender. It should be grown in full sunlight. It needs a fertile well drained soil. Seed need soil temperatures of at least 19-24°C to start growing. In Papua New Guinea it grows from sea level up to about 2,000 m altitude. It suits hardiness zones 10-12. Bontoc. In XTBG Yunnan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants can be grown from seed or cuttings. Semi-ripe cuttings are used.

Harvesting and Seed Production

It flowers and fruits throughout the year in Papua New Guinea. Plants grown from cuttings tend to flower at a younger age.

NOTES

The plant is often used for face and body painting. There is only one Bixa species. It has anticancer and antioxidant properties.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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