



PLANT FACT SHEET

Piper nigrum L.

GENUS *Piper* FAMILY Piperaceae

COMMON NAMES Pepper

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Seeds, Herb, Spice, Fruit

The berries are used as a spice.

The dried fruit are used as pepper. Black pepper is dried with the skin on and white pepper has the skin soaked off and removed before drying.

Immature green berries are sold in brine or dried.

DESCRIPTION

A climbing, green, leafy vine. It is woody. The nodes are enlarged. The plant has roots on the main stem which attach to tree trunks. The vines can be 8-10 m long. The leaf stalk is 1-2 cm long. The leaf blade is oval and 10-15 cm long by 5-9 cm wide. It is thick and leathery. The base is rounded and it tapers to a short tip. The flowers are usually of one sex but many flowers occur together. The spikes are opposite the leaves. The spikes are 3-3.5 cm long by 0.8 mm wide. They can be 10 cm long. It has clusters of berries on the side branches. The berries are red when ripe. They are 3-4 mm across.

HABITAT

It is a tropical plant. It grows from sea level up to at least 1100 m altitude in equatorial places. It suits areas with a temperature between 24° and 26°C. It cannot tolerate frost. It likes high humidity and shade. It does best with a rainfall between 1200 and 2500 mm per year. It has been planted in commercial stands in a few coastal areas of Papua New Guinea. In the Cairns Botanical Gardens. It originally came from the tropics of India. It occurs in the Western Ghats in India. It suits hardiness zones 10-12.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are normally grown from cuttings of the main (rooted) vine. Pruning of the tips can increase branch formation on which berries are produced. It needs a support to climb. Plants can be grown from seeds.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Berries dried with the skin give white pepper.

Berries where the skin is soaked off produce black pepper. To do these they are soaked in water for a few days. Plants produce in the third year. They can continue producing for 20 years. Flowering normally follows rain. Fruit ripen after 3-4 months.

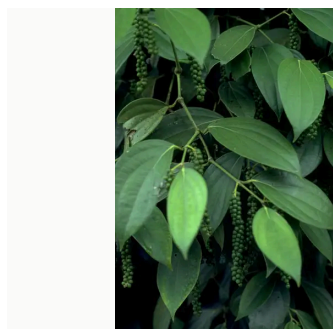
NOTES

There are between 1000-2000 Piper species. They are mostly in the tropics.

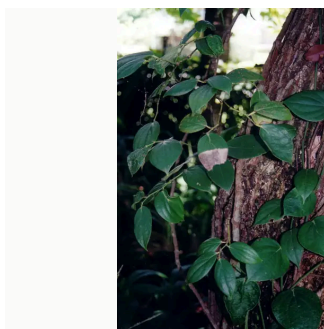
PICTURES



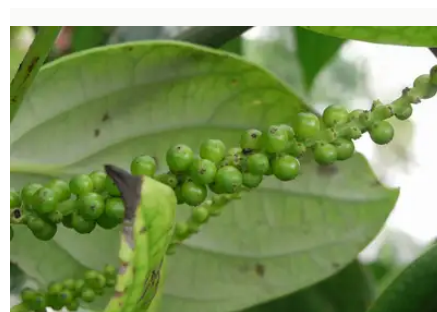
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