PLANT FACT SHEET

Schinus molle L.

GENUS *Schinus* **FAMILY** Anacardiaceae

COMMON NAMES Peruvian mastic tree, Peruvian peppertree

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: fruit - spice, Leaves - spice

The leaves and fruit have a peppery taste. They are used to make a drink.
The dried, roasted berries are used as a peppery substitute.
An oil distilled from the fruit is use as a spice.
CAUTION: There are some reports that the peppercorns are harmful. They contain an alkaloid. They should not be eaten in large amounts.
The fruit are used to make wine.

DESCRIPTION

A small shrubby evergreen tree. It grows 4-8 m high but can be 15 m tall. It spreads about 2-5 m across. The trunk is short and 25-35 cm across. The crown is spreading and the branches hang downwards. The bark is dark brown and peels off. If the bark is damaged a very sticky fluid is produced. The leaves are narrow and spiky. They hang down and look like feathers. They are compound leaves up to 30 cm long with many (19-41) narrow leaflets up to 7 cm long. The leaves have a peppery smell if crushed. Trees are separately male and female. The flowers are small and produced in clusters at the ends of branches. They are green-yellow. The fruit are small and berry like. They hang on female trees and vary between green, red and black. The hanging flower stalks are 8-20 cm long. They are edible.

HABITAT

It grows in tropical and subtropical regions. It suits warm dry climates. It is damaged by frost. It needs temperatures above 10°C. It prefers well drained soils but will grow in most soils. It can grow in sandy soils. It is very drought resistant. It will grow in areas with less than 1,000 mm rainfall. It does best in a sunny position. In the tropics it grows at higher elevations. It can tolerate alkalinity and salinity. In Ethiopia it grows from sea level to 2,400 m altitude. It can grow in arid places. It suits hardiness zones 9-11. Arboretum Tasmania.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are grown from seed. There are 30,000 to 40,000 seeds per kg. They germinate reasonably well. Seed can be stored. Because branches tend to fall from mature trees they should not be put close to buildings.

Harvesting and Seed Production

It is a fast growing tree. Trees reach maturity in about 20 years. Trees can be topped or pruned.

NOTES

Because the pepper corns are very oily they can clog the pepper grinder. There are about 30 Schinus species. This is an alternative host to black citrus scale.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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