PLANT FACT SHEET

Calamus australis C. Martius

GENUS *Calamus* **FAMILY** Arecaceae

COMMON NAMES Hairy Mary, Lawyer cane, Wait-a while

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit

The flesh of the fruit can be eaten. This can also be used for a drink.

DESCRIPTION

A climbing cane. It climbs high into trees using other plants as support. It can climb 26 m high. There are many stems which are very slender and covered with sharp spines. The stems are 2-3 cm across and the spines can be 8 cm long. These arise from an underground rhizome. There are purple hairs on the new growth. The leaves can be 1-2.5 m long. The leaf has many narrow leaflets with a feather-like appearance. There are many backward pointing spines along the leaf stalk. There are 25-56 leaflets. They are 10-30 cm long and 2-3 cm wide. The edges are curved downwards at the base of the leaf. The leaf can also have a 3 m long armed extension on the end. The flower stalk is long and spiny and hangs down. It can be 2-3 m long. Male and female flowers occur on separate plants. The fruit are pea sized and whitish and covered with scales. They are 1.5-2.6 cm wide. They hang in bunches. The flesh is edible. The seed are small and irregularly shaped. There is one seed in each fruit and the seed are 10 mm across.

HABITAT

It is a tropical plant. It grows in rainforests forming impenetrable thickets along the edge of the forest. They do best in cool, shady sites. They need rich, well-drained soil. They will grow in temperate places. In northern Australia they grow from sea level to above 1,000 m altitude.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants can be grown from seed which must be planted very fresh. The seed germinate in a few weeks. If allowed to dry out, seed germinate very erratically. Seedlings are not easy to transplant.

Harvesting and Seed Production

In Australia, fruit occur from November to February.

NOTES

There are 375-400 Calamus species. There are 175 species in tropical Asia.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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PROVIDED BY **Food Plants International**

French, B.R. & Maynard, A.R. Food Plants International Database. Food Plants International

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