PLANT FACT SHEET

Pistacia vera L.

GENUS *Pistacia* **FAMILY** Anacardiaceae

COMMON NAMES Pistachio nut

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit, Nuts, Seeds, Flavouring, Spice

The nuts are eaten after roasting and salting. They can be eaten raw. They are used in confectionery, ice cream, cakes, pies, soups etc.
An edible oil can be produced from the seed.
The fruits can be used for marmalade.
Caution: It contains urushiol that can cause allergic reactions in some people.

DESCRIPTION

A small deciduous tree up to about 10 metres tall. It can have one or several trunks. Trees tend to droop and spread. Leaves are large and greyish. They have 3-5 leaflets. These are roundish and 5-10 cm long. Trees produces clusters of small green nuts. Male and female flowers are borne on different trees. Male and female flowers occur on separate trees. The fruit are red and wrinkled. The kernel is 3 cm long by 1.5 cm wide. It is protected by a thin shell. The seed is edible. There are several named cultivated varieties.

HABITAT

It is a warm temperate and Mediterranean climate plant. It suits hot dry places. They do well in light calcareous soils. They need fertile, well-drained soils. They can tolerate drought. Winters need to be cool to break bud dormancy. Trees need 600 to 1,500 hours of chilling below 6°C. Trees do not do well in areas with high humidity. They grow in places with temperatures from -10°C in the winter to 40°C in the summer. In western Asia they grow to 1500 m altitude. They do best with a pH of 7-7.8. It suits hardiness zones 8-10.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Mostly grown from seed. The seed should be presoaked in alkalized water or for 3-4 days in warm water before sowing. Germination can be slow and irregular. Cuttings of half ripe wood from young trees can be used. Trees can be grown by layering. Because male and female flowers occur on separate trees both male and female trees must be present. One male tree to 5 female trees is suitable. It is possible to graft a male branch onto a female tree. The pollen is carried by wind. The flowers are small and green in clusters in the axils of leaves. The nuts are normally knocked off the trees then harvested off the ground.

Harvesting and Seed Production

It is slow growing. Seedlings take 8 years to bear. Budded and grafted trees can bear in 4 years. Peak production is reached after about 20 years. Trees can live for centuries under suitable conditions. The fruit take several months to mature.

NOTES

It forms hybrids with Pistacia khinjuk and Pistacia atlantica.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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