PLANT FACT SHEET

Piper auritium H. B. Kunth

GENUS *Piper* **FAMILY** Piperaceae

COMMON NAMES Ear-leafed pepper, Mexican pepper leaf

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Stem, Leaves - tea, Flower spikes - flavouring

The leaves are used to flavour soups and other dishes. It has the smell and flavour of sarsaparilla. It is used to flavour wild game such as armadillo, freshwater snails and is wrapped around dough.
CAUTION: Hoja santa oil contains saffrole which can cause cancer. It should therefore only be used in small amounts.
The young leaves are sometimes cooked and eaten as greens.

DESCRIPTION

A herb or small tree. It keeps growing from year to year. It grows 2-5 m tall. The stems are swollen at the nodes. It has large heart shaped leaves. They are 30 cm long. The sides at the base are unequal. The leaves taper to the tip and are softly hairy. The leaf stalk has wings. The leaves have an anise scent. The flowers are white. They are on erect, slender spikes. These droop at the ends. They are 15-28 cm long. This flower stalk is produced opposite a leaf. The fruit is small and fleshy.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It suits seasonally moist, moderate rainfall. It can grow in an average, well-drained soil. It can grow in full sun or light shade. In Costa Rica it grows from sea level to about 1,700 m altitude. It suits hardiness zones 10-12.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

It can spread by suckers. Seeds are also scattered by bats.

NOTES

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

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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