

Cubeb Berries

Also known as

Piper cubeba, Tailed Pepper.

Introduction

Cubeb berries are a "red" alternative to black pepper, bitter, peppery, and pungent, with traces of camphor and nutmeg in their aroma. The herb is native to the Spice Islands of the Indian Ocean, traded to Europeans since the sixteenth century but never as popular as the better known black and white peppers. Cubeb berries are added to gin, and widely thought to be aphrodisiac. The stalked berries are a little larger than peppercorns, and have a furrowed surface. Most cubeb berries are hollow, although some contain a white kernel.

Constituents

The dried fruits contain up to 10% essential oil composed of monoterpenes (sabinene 50%, carene, a-thujene, 1,4-cineol and 1,8-cineol) and sesquiterpenes (copaene, a- and b-cubebene, b-cadinene, caryophyllene, germacrene, cubebol). The pungency is caused by the lignane cubebin (2%) and several related compounds: hinokinin, clusin, dihydroclusin, and dihydrocubebin.

Parts Used

Dried berries, often with stems mixed in.

Typical Preparations

Teas, capsules, tinctures, and as an essential oil, also used to make curries with curative properties.

Summary

The traditional use of cubeb berries was for the regulation of the sex life, both as an aphrodisiac and as a remedy for sexually transmitted diseases.

Precautions

"Ashanti pepper" from Central America does not have the same medicinal applications as cubeb pepper, although it has a less pungent aroma and a lighter taste.