

Grains of Paradise Profile

Also known as

Aframomum melegueta, melegueta pepper, alligator pepper, Guinea grains or Guinea pepper

Introduction

Grains of Paradise are the seeds of an herbaceous perennial plant native to the swamplands of the West African coast. The plant bears pods 5 to 7 cm long containing abundant small, reddish-brown seeds. Once a prized commodity, Grains of Paradise received their name during the Middle Ages. The coast of West Africa became known as the Grain Coast because Grains of Paradise were traded there.

Constituents

Gingerol, paradol, shagaol, manganese, gum, tannin, starch.

Parts Used

Ground seeds.

Typical Preparations

Grains of Paradise are commonly used in West and North African cooking. Traditionally, they have been imported through the Sahara desert via caravan, and from there to Sicily and Italy. Today, the spice is not widely known outside of West and North Africa, except as a flavor additive in certain beers and gins. In the United States, Grains of Paradise have undergone a small but enthusiastic revival due to their use by some celebrated chefs. Currently, they are popularly used by many of our nation's leading breweries.

Summary

In West African folk medicine, Grains of Paradise are valued for their warming and digestive properties. They are also used by people on certain diets, such as a raw food diet, because they are less irritating to digestion than black pepper.

Precautions

People who are allergic to cardamom or ginger should use Grains of Paradise fruit with caution. Since "Grains of Paradise" is a name given to several other spices, make sure to use authentic Aframomum melegueta.