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Fatsia japonica

[Synonyms : *Aralia japonica*, *Aralia sieboldii*, *Fatsia sieboldii*]

FALSE CASTER-OIL PLANT is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to Japan it has small, greenish-white flowers.

It is also known as Castor oil bush, Fatsi, Fatsia, *Fatsia japonská* (Slovak), Fig-leaf palm, Glossy-leaved paper plant, Japanese aralia, Japanese fatsia, Japanese spikenard, Paper plant, *Prodara* (Czech), and *Zimmeraralie* (German).

Japonica means ‘of or from Japan’.

False castor-oil plant was discovered in Japan by the Swedish botanist, Carl Per Thunberg (1743-1828) and introduced to Europe from there by a Bavarian physician and botanist, Dr. Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796-1866). For six years until 1829 von Siebold lived in Japan as medical officer to the Dutch East India Company but was then expelled for obtaining too much information about that Country. (Some of this information was said to cover maps of the Japanese mainland obtained from the Court astronomer – an act that at that time attracted a death penalty.) He was permitted to leave with the plants and seeds he had collected and these included this species.

It was not until 1838 that the plant arrived in England.

There is a superstition in Japan that the huge hand-like leaves can repel devils.