

Pimenta dioica

[Synonyms : *Caryophyllus pimento*, *Eugenia divaricata* var. *ovalis*, *Eugenia micrantha*, *Eugenia pimenta*, *Eugenia pimenta* var. *longifolia*, *Eugenia pimenta* var. *ovalifolia*, *Evanesca crassifolia*, *Evanesca micrantha*, *Myrtus dioica*, *Myrtus pimenta*, *Myrtus pimenta* var. *brevifolia*, *Myrtus pimenta* var. *longifolia*, *Myrtus pimento* var. *ovalifolia*, *Myrtus piperita*, *Myrtus tabasco*, *Pimenta aromatica*, *Pimenta communis*, *Pimenta officinalis*, *Pimenta officinalis* var. *longifolia*, *Pimenta officinalis* var. *ovalifolia*, *Pimenta officinalis* var. *tenuifolia*, *Pimenta pimenta*, *Pimenta vulgaris*, *Pimentus vera*]

ALLSPICE is an evergreen tree. Native to Middle America and the West Indies (particularly Jamaica) it has many small fragrant, greenish-white flowers.

It is also known as Allspice tree, *Bahar* (Arabic), Bayberry, Carolina allspice, Clove pepper, *Gandamenasu* (Kannada), Indian wood tree, Jamaican pepper, Jamaica pepper, *Kappalmulaku* (Malayalam), *Kattukkaruva* (Tamil), *Kryddpeppar* (Swedish), *Maustepippuri* (Finnish), Myrtle pepper, *Nelkempfeffer* (German), *Pepe di Giamaica* (Italian), *Piment* (Dutch, French, German), *Pimenta*, *Pimenta da Jamaica* (Portuguese), *Pimentbaum* (German), *Piment de la Jamaïque* (French), *Pimento* (English, Italian, Spanish), *Pimentovník lékařský* (Slovak), *Pimentovník pravý* (Czech), Pineapple shrub, *Poivre giroflée* (French), *Sipaisi* (Tongan), Strawberry shrub, *Toute épice* (French), Whole spice, and *Yamayski pyerets* (Russian); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of compassion.

The trees can remain productive for about 100 years. Leaves are gathered for use fresh or dried. After the fruit are sun or kiln-dried (when they become rough-surfaced and turn dark reddish-brown) they are kept whole or ground (including the skin of the berry which has the strongest flavour). The fruit are also distilled to obtain essential oil known variously as Oil of Pimento or Oil of Allspice; and oil is also extracted from the leaves.

Warning – handling allspice can cause dermatitis.

Allspice, black pepper (*Piper nigrum*) and cubeb (*Piper cubeba*) are often confused. When dried 2-celled allspice is dark reddish brown, 1-celled black pepper is black and 1-celled cubeb is grey.

Dioica refers to the male and female flowers growing on separate plants ie. dioecious. The fruit's similarity in appearance to peppercorns (for which the Spanish is *pimento* ie. pepper, *Piper nigrum*) led to the name Pimento.

The Aztecs used to flavour chocolate (*Theobroma cacao*) with allspice seeds (one of the few spices that are native to the western hemisphere).

Imported into Britain in the early 17th Century this spice was described as 'allspice' in 1693 because its flavour resembles a combination of cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum*), cloves (*Syzygium aromaticum*) and nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*). This is well illustrated by an often-suggested alternative for use in home cooking ie. the whole or ground berries of nutmeg, cinnamon, and cloves mixed in the proportion of 1:2:2.

The Jamaican plantations that are the source of most European supplies are natural woodland dominated by the allspice tree and are called Pimento Walks. Locally Jamaicans make a liqueur with the flesh of the berries which is said to be delicious and is prepared to be ready for Christmas celebrations there.

The hard pinkish wood was once employed for the manufacture of walking sticks and umbrella handles.

Powdered spice is vulnerable to adulteration and in the past allspice has been no exception.

Spice from the bayberry tree (*Pimenta racemosa*), from American spice bush (*Lindera benzoin*) and from Carolina allspice (*Calycanthus floridus*) have all been individually added to or substituted for the real thing. During the American War of Independence in the 1770s allspice itself was used as a substitute for previously imported spices that were no longer available.

Allspice can be used as flavouring to disguise the taste of medicine.

Today allspice is used as a flavouring in liqueurs eg. Benedictine, Chartreuse and is also used by the food industry, particularly in sausages, sauces, fish preserves, ketchups, pickles, ice cream and baked food. The oil is an ingredient used by the toiletry industry in soaps and by the perfumery industry as well.

Medicinally, the powdered fruit have been used to treat wind, diarrhoea and rheumatism.