

OF PIPER AND GARDENING

B. Sasikumar

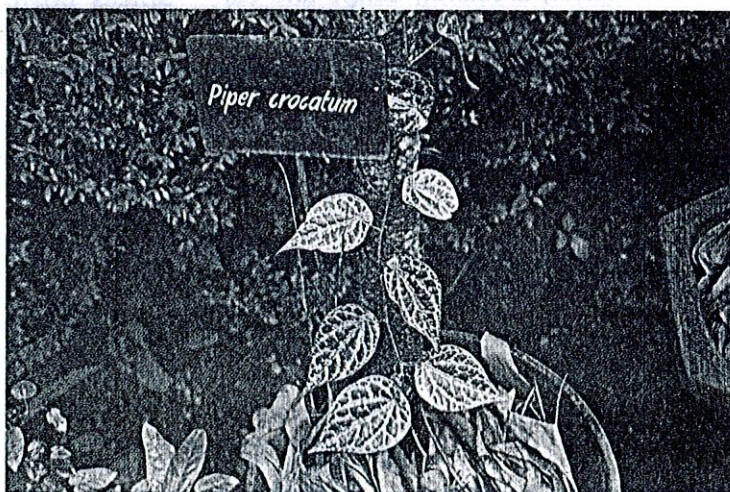
The genus *Piper* includes more than 1000 species and is pantropical in distribution. South and Central America as well as South Asia are main the centres of concentration of the genus. "King of Spices" black pepper (*Piper nigrum* L) medicinal species such as *Piper longum*, *P. chaba*, *P. methysticum*, *P. cubaba*, *P. mullesua*, *P. aurantiacum*, and the masticatory species *P. betle* are much known members of *Piper* family.

Apart from the above species of economic importance there are few other *Piper* sp. of ornamental value though not much known widely. In the Index of Garden Plants (Macmillan, London, 1992) *Piper* sp. of ornamental significance are described. Among all the ornamental member of the genus, *P. magnificum* comes first. Known also as 'Lacquered pepper' the species is endemic to Peru. It is an erect, attractive shrub reaching a height of 1m. Stem and



P. magnificum

petiole are winged. Leaves are of 15 x 11.5 cm, ovate to broadly elliptic or suborbicular, rounded or broadly acute at apex and cordate



P. ornatum

to auriculate at base. Leaves are glossy, deep green in colour,

bright maroon beneath with white margins and veins, quilted. This species can be grown as a leafy ornamental in pots.

P. ornatum, sometimes wrongly referred to as *P. crocatum* is another attractive ornamental species of the genus *Piper*. Known also as 'Celebes pepper' it is a shrub either spreading, creeping or a shy climber

reaching about 5m height. Stem is wiry. Leaves are of 9.5 x 7.5 cm in size, broadly cordate to suborbicular, pellate, rounded or acute and alternate at apex, rounded to cordate at base. Leaves are finely mottled, dark green, pink and silver above with red and white spots but flush purple beneath, Spike small.

P. decurrens found in Costa Rica to Colombia, *P. parphyrophyllum* occurring in Malaysia, *P. rubro-nodosum* of Colombia and *P. rubrovenosum* of New Guinea are some other *Piper* sp. of garden value.