

Voatsiperifery: The Costliest and the Rarest of Peppers

P.N. RAVINDRAN

Principal Scientist & HoD (Rtd), IISR-ICAR, Marykunnu P.O.
Kozhikkode

Introduction

Voatsiperifery pepper is the rarest and the costliest of the peppers traded in the international market. Since it is produced only from the wild plants of Madagascar forests and the annual production coming for trading is only around 1500 kg, it is considered one of the most costly varieties. It is valued by the gourmet experts for its very rare, rich and



Piper borbonense vrucht

unique aroma and combined with pungency. The name voatsiperifery is derived from “voa” meaning fruits and “tsiperifery”, meaning pepper in the Malagasy language.

The wild pepper vines grow high, climbing on the trees in the forest, and the fruits are produced only on the young, new grown shoots. They are hand-harvested from the wild by farmers who go into the forest especially to pick them once a year. Voatsiperifery pepper berries look similar to the cubeb pepper (sometimes

called Java pepper or tailed pepper) but are somewhat smaller; they have a 3mm long oval shaped head with a 5-6 mm long tail.

When dried they have a brown-black colour similar to normal black pepper. The flavour of these voatsiperifery peppercorns is earthy and woody taste, with a certain citrus floweriness that gives some freshness to the palate, the flavours are long lasting. Christine McFadden in her book “Pepper” describes the flavours as follows: “gingery aroma with hint of cloves-complex flavour - woody, resinous, sweetish. pungent bite.”

Uses

This peppery spice is sought after by the highly expensive Paris restaurants for adding that “nowhere else to get” taste and flavour to the choicest dishes of such restaurants. Such restaurants depute their executives to the production spot in Madagascar to gather this spice from the tribesmen who were involved in the harvesting it from the forests.

Its uses are similar to those of black pepper; but it differs from black pepper by its lower pungency and higher flavour and a taste that is unique. It can be ground and then added to food as an exotic finishing flavour that gives a different dimension than the black pepper. The flavour is long lasting on the palate, it goes well with lamb and pork as well as with fruits and chocolate. It can be best used a finishing spice, or a condiment to be added immediately after cooking or before serving and in such

cases it can lift the flavour profile of the dish significantly, be it any dish - whether meat or fish, particularly rich oily fish, or pork. This pepper also goes well with sweet dishes; it can be sprinkled over fruit salad, can be added to cakes and even can be sprinkled over ice creams to get a distinct change in the flavour. Adding this pepper lightens up lightly pan fried vegetables. It is said that this pepper "supports the structure of a hollandaise emulsion sauce; enhances a herb roasted bass; brings out the flavours of roasted chicken and is great with sauted girolles."



Piper borbonense

Morphology

Plants are climbers mainly on supporting trees, reaching up to 20 m in the natural forest habitat of the forests of Madagascar. Plants are dioecious, male and female plants are separate. Stem woody, dichotomously branched. Leaves are alternate, oblong, acute, moderately firm

in texture, glabrous on both surfaces, 5-8 cm long, unequal at base, rounded or obscurely cordate, with 4-6 slender secondary ribs branching from the midrib on each side and anastomosing in arches. Leaves are petiolate, petiole 6-12 mm long, slightly pilose. Spikes are dioecious, male spikes, 5-8 cm long, on short, leaf-opposed peduncles. Flowers are in crowded spiral rows, bract stalked, round, minutely ciliated. Stamens are three, filaments longer than the oblong anthers, anthers exerted. Female spike are dense-flowered, flowers are pedicillate, rachis slightly hairy, stigmas three. Fruits (called berries, though botanically drupes) are ovoid, shorter than the pedicel, bright red when ripe. These florists, who originally described the plants from its natural habitats, mistook them for parasites over trees. No other botanical information is available on the species.

Chemical Notes

No information is available on the chemical composition of the fruits though many chemical compounds have been reported in vegetative parts.

Functional Properties

No information available on the functional properties.

References

The chapter is based on P.N. Ravindran's Encyclopaedia of Herbs and Spices, Vol. 2. CABI, UK. (See Chapter 223)

Scientific name: *Piper borbonense* (Piperaceae)
Common names: Voatsiperifery, Madagascar wild pepper, Madagascar long pepper, Madagascar cubeb, Liane pepper.

