



Fish Mint Plant

Add Fishy Taste To Dishes

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Prefer fish taste but not the fish? Then this underutilized spice comes handy! *Houttuynia cordata* or fish mint plant is an edible plant of family Saururaceae native to the mountainous regions of Eastern Asia, occurring up to an elevation of 2500 M MSL. The plant is wide spread in North Eastern India. The leaf of *Houttuynia* possess an unusual fish smell / taste that has often been described 'fishy' (hence the name fish mint plant). Other names of the species include, Fish leaf, Rainbow plant, Chameleon plant, Heart leaf, Lizard tail or Bishop's weed in English besides *Ja-myryda* or *Jmyr-doh* in Khasi; *Machha-turi* in Garo; *Ashunday*, *Tengalai*, *Dimasa-Mojoukhmo*,

Hmar- Aithang and *Pnar- Jarmendo* in Assam; *Mumbre*, *Siiya hamang*, *Muchandariin* in Arunachal Pradesh; *Toning khokin* in Manipur; *Uithinthang* in Mizoram; *Nuichua* or *Nokana* in Nagaland and *Ghandhay jhar* in North Bengal and Sikkim.

H. cordata is a perennial rhizomatous herb grown up to 60 cm height. Rhizomes are thin and creeping in nature. Leaves are alternate, broadly ovate to cordate, 4-9 cm long and 3-8 cm broad. Flowers are greenish yellow and borne on a terminal spike with four to six large white basal bracts.

The plant is usually propagated through rhizomes, root balls or seeds. The rhizomes are cut into small pieces of 3-5 cm and placed at about 5 cm below the surface soil for propagation. Generally it is planted during the first week of February in Assam. It starts flowering in the month of April and continues up to November. Fruiting period is between May to December. Juvenile plants of about one and half month old are preferred in the market for consumption.

It is commonly grown as a leafy vegetable and used as a fresh herbal garnish. In Assam people make chutney from the leaves which



Fig-1. Bundles of *H. cordata* in a local market in Haflong, Assam



Fig-2. *H. cordata* established at conserved at IISR Farm, Peruvannamuzhi

gives a "fish" taste. Manipuri people eat both raw and cooked leaves. Besides its culinary uses *H. cordata* is having many ethno botanical uses. It acts against allergies, asthma and bacterial infection. The whole plant is dried and used for treatments in antipyretics, diuretics, cold, detoxification, swelling, hypertension etc. Leaf extract is used in dysentery and rhizomes are used for stomach ulcers. Boiled extract of rhizomes is consumed for muscular pain due to over strain.

It is sold in the local markets as small bundles of rhizomes and leaves (Fig-1) weighing approximately 50-100 g at a price of `10-20. Considering the importance of this underutilized spice, it is collected (Fig.2) and conserved at the ICAR-Indian Institute of Spices Research (IISR). The plant will come up in Kerala climate and will have good potential as the native people prefer fish tastes in many cuisines. The sizeable population of North East Indian work force in Kerala also will prefer the plant for their culinary preparations.

