

## **Pink Pepper – fruit from the *Schinus terebinthifolius***

Related Ingredient: *Pink PepperSlim*

The botanical name *Schinus terebinthifolius* alludes to two Mediterranean trees that were esteemed since antiquity for their aromatic resins: mastic, *Pistacia lentiscus* (Greek *schinos*) and terebinth or turpentine tree, *Pistacia terebinthus* (Greek *terebinthos*). Both belong to the same plant family as *Schinus*.

Synonyms: Christmasberry, Brazilian Pepper Tree, Florida Holly, Brazilian Holly, Rose Pepper



## BOTANY

**Plant family:** Anacardiaceae (cashew family)

Sprawling shrub or small tree, reaching a height of 7–10 m, which can live over 30 years. Its plastic morphology allows it to thrive in all kinds of ecosystems: from dunes to swamps, where it grows as a quasi-aquatic plant.

**BRANCHES:** The branches can be upright, reclining, or nearly vine-like, all on the same plant.

**LEAVES:** The leaves are alternate, 10–22 cm long, compound with 5-15 leaflets; the leaflets are roughly oval, 3–6 cm long and 2-3.5 cm broad, and have finely toothed margins, an acute to rounded apex and yellowish veins.

**FLOWERS:** Small, white, with 5 sepals and 5 petals about 2 mm long. The flowering occurs all year round but with the main flush in autumn (from September to November) and a smaller flush in spring.

**FRUITS:** The fruit is a small red spherical drupe 4–5 mm diameter, carried in dense clusters of hundreds of berries. The fruits are initially green, becoming bright red when ripe, and are usually mature by December.

**SEEDS:** Seeds are dark brown and 0.3mm in diameter.



## BIOTOPE

*Schinus terebinthifolius* occurs in sub-tropical areas between latitudes 15° and 30° North and South in many countries. It is a pioneer species and an invader of moist and wet lowland environments. It is commonly found in disturbed sites, such as canals, drained wetlands, and fallow fields and farmlands but is also successful in undisturbed natural environments including pinelands, hammocks, and mangroves.

*Schinus terebinthifolius* prefers partial sun to full sun, grows in a variety of soil types, and is known to be fairly tolerant to shade, high salinity, flooding, and fire. *Schinus terebinthifolius* is sensitive to cold temperatures.

## **GEOGRAPHIC AND HISTORIC DISTRIBUTION**

Native to Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay, *Schinus terebinthifolius* has established in many areas outside its native range, such as Australia, South Africa, Mediterranean Europe, southern Asia, and the United States, including Puerto Rico.

Although *Schinus terebinthifolius* was introduced to the United States as an ornamental from the mid to late 1800s, it did not establish outside of cultivation in Florida until the 1950s. *Schinus terebinthifolius* occurs throughout southern and central Florida, including islands off its coast. *Schinus terebinthifolius* was introduced to Hawaii as an ornamental before 1911.

The main producer for the European market is La Réunion, followed by Turkey and other Mediterranean countries.

## **MEDICINAL USES**

All parts of this tropical tree, including its leaves, bark, fruit, seeds, resin, and oleoresin (or balsam) have been used medicinally by indigenous peoples throughout the tropics. The plant has a very long history of use and appears in ancient religious artefacts and on idols among some of the ancient Chilean Amerindians.

*Schinus terebinthifolius* is still employed in herbal medicine today in many countries. Throughout South and Central America, *Schinus terebinthifolius* is reported to be an astringent, antibacterial, diuretic, digestive stimulant, tonic, antiviral, and wound healer. In Peru, the sap is used as a mild laxative and a diuretic, and the entire plant is used externally for fractures and as a topical antiseptic. The oleoresin is used externally as a wound healer, to stop bleeding, and for toothaches, and it is taken internally for rheumatism and as a purgative. In Argentina, a decoction is made with the dried leaves and is taken for menstrual disorders and is also used for respiratory and urinary tract infections and disorders. In the Brazilian Amazon, a bark tea is used as a laxative, and a bark-and-leaf tea is used as a stimulant and antidepressant.

In South Africa, a leaf tea is used to treat colds, and a leaf decoction is inhaled for colds, hypertension, depression, and irregular heart beat.

## **FOOD USES**

Fruits of *Schinus terebinthifolius* are also used in the food industry. Although it is not a true pepper, its dried drupes are often sold as pink peppercorns. The seeds can be used as a spice, adding a pepper-like taste to food. They are usually sold in a dry state and have a bright pink color. Pink peppercorns have a sweet fruity fragrance combined with a delicate, sweet, and peppery, but not hot flavor. Their flavor is reminiscent of a mild citrus zest and sweet berry mixture. Pink peppercorns can be used in fruit sauces, vinaigrette, desserts, and with other fruit flavours.

## **BEAUTY**

Fruits are also well known by perfumers for their use in fragrance compositions. Two famous perfumers working today – Jean-Claude Ellena and Geza Schoen, who create scents for Ormonde Jayne – use a lot of pink pepper. The pink pepper used in perfumery is cultivated on the island of La Reunion.