

SPICE UP YOUR GARDEN

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Hardy plants that are both ornamental and used as spices? Sounds unlikely, but you may already be growing some of them.

From South Eastern USA, Carolina allspice (*Calycanthus floridus*) has a strongly aromatic bark that may be scraped from dried twiggy prunings and used just like cinnamon or allspice. Suitable for a position in full sun or partial shade in any fertile soil, this shrub bears dark red, strawberry-scented flowers in summer.

Sichuan pepper (*Zanthoxylum simulans*) is another hardy shrub or small tree, this time from the Himalayas. Sichuan pepper is used in oriental recipes and is an ingredient of five-spice. This plant requires similar conditions to the previous one; it is self-fertile and will produce a crop of pinkish 'peppercorns' in September. When ripe, the seeds protrude from their husk; it is the husk that is used as a spice. Don't eat this raw - it will numb your mouth in the most alarming way. The young foliage of this plant can also be used as a flavouring; it has a complex flavour and aroma with a definite citrus note. The leaves of the closely related *Z. piperatum* have an even better flavour and are used in Japan (where they are known as kinome), finely chopped and sprinkled over seafood dishes, or used in a similar way to bay leaves. Unlike *Z. simulans*, berries will only be produced if you grow both male and female plants.

The Tasmanian mountain pepper (*Tasmannia lanceolata* syn. *Drimys lanceolata*) will also enjoy similar growing conditions to the above. A handsome evergreen shrub, this has dark green foliage and bright pink/red stems. The leaves are used like bay leaves but have a taste both peppery and fruity. If both male and female plants are grown, it will also produce berries which may be dried and used just like peppercorns.

The Stag's Horn Sumach (*Rhus typhina*) is so well known that it hardly needs description, and it is also well known that it can sucker profusely - plant with caution! Less well known is the fact that the Moroccan spice sumac is obtained from the closely related *Rhus coriaria*). The fuzzy cones of *R. typhina* may be used in the same way by cutting them off, in late August, when they are red and hanging them up to dry, taking care to avoid the sap, which can irritate the skin. When dried, the 'fuzz' is plucked and stored in jars to be used for its tart flavour in Moroccan recipes.

If you can arrange an area that can be kept moist and shaded in summer and not too wet in winter then the hardy Japanese ginger (*Zingiber mioga*) also known as myoga, is easy. It is an attractive perennial with exotic looking foliage and intriguing orchid-like flowers which appear at ground level in autumn. It is not the root of this ginger that is eaten, but the young shoots and unopened flower buds that are both used in Japanese cuisine. A Japanese friend tells me that overindulgence in myoga is said to lead to memory loss, so perhaps wise not to overdo it!

Hardy annuals; coriander, fenugreek, fennel and dill, are all so easy that they have even become naturalised in parts of the UK.

I doubt that there is anywhere else in the world where all these plants could be grown, unprotected, in the same garden, so why not plant a world of spices in your garden?