

Long Pepper (*Piper longum* L. and *Piper retrofractum* Vahl)

Synonyms

Amharic	ጠራሽ Timiz
English	Balinese pepper*, Jaborandi pepper, Bengal pepper
French	Poivre long
German	Langer Pfeffer, Stangenpfeffer, Balinesischer Pfeffer*, Jaborandi-Pfeffer, Bengalischer Pfeffer
Hindi	पीपल, पिपल, पिप्पली Pipal, Pippli
Indonesian	Cabé bali, Cabe jawa*, Lada panjang
Tamil	திப்பலி, வனபிப்பிலி Tippali, Vanapippili

Note

In the above list, names referring to South East Asian long pepper, *P. retrofractum*, are marked with an asterisk. Names without asterisk are either generic or refer to the South Asian species *P. longum* alone.

Used plant part

The tiny berries, which merge to a single, rod-like structure which bears some resemblance to catkins (flowers of trees like hazelnut or willow).

Plant family

Piperaceae (pepper family).

Sensory quality

Hot and warm, with sweet and somewhat earthy overtones (some compare it with moist hemp ropes). For accounts on sweet or pungent spices, see licorice and negro pepper, respectively.

Main constituents

In *P. retrofractum*, piperine, piperlonguminine, sylvatine, guineensine, piperlongumine, filifiline, sitosterol, methyl piperate and a series of piperine-analog retrofractamides are reported.

(Phytochemistry, 24, 279, 1985)

The content of piperine (about 6%) is slightly higher than in black pepper.

On the other hand, long pepper contains less essential oil than its relatives (about 1%), which consists of sesquiterpene hydrocarbons and ethers (bisabolene, β -caryophyllene, caryophyllene oxide, each 10 to 20%; α -zingiberene, 5%), and, surprisingly, saturated aliphatic hydrocarbons: 18% pentadecane, 7% tridecane, 6% heptadecane.

Origin

The species *Piper longum* is of South Asian origin (Deccan peninsular), whereas the closely related *Piper retrofractum* comes from South East Asia and is mostly cultivated in Indonesia and Thailand. Both species are often not clearly distinguished in the spice trade.

Etymology

Pepper and related words names in most other European tongues ultimately derive from the Sanskrit name of long pepper, *pippali* [पिप्पलि, पिप्पली] Long pepper reached Europe earlier than the now much more important black pepper, and thus the latter inherited the name of the former.

There is no known etymology for Sanskrit *pippali*, the word clearly being of non-Indo-European origin. Note that *pippala* [पिप्पल] is the Sanskrit names of the sacred fig (*Ficus religiosa*) which figures prominently in Buddhism because Siddharta Gautama got enlightened while sitting in the shadow of such a tree. That name occurs already in the early Rigveda and has been tentatively categorized as neither Indo-European nor Dravidian nor Munda, but belonging to an ancient, now extinct “language X” of Northern India that is visible only through some loan words in later tongues.

The first Europeans enjoying pepper were the Greeks. They called the spice *peperi* [πέπερι], which is pretty close to the original Sanskrit word. When the dominion of the Mediterranean passed from the Greeks to the Romans, the latter also inherited the former’s rôle as main pepper consumers. In fact, late Roman cuisine depended heavily on Eastern spices in general, and both long and black pepper in particular (see also silphion). In Latin, pepper was called *piper*, still today the botanical genus name.

Latin *piper* is progenitor of almost all names of pepper in contemporary European languages. See black pepper for more information.

Since words derived from Latin *piper* signify “black pepper” in all modern European languages, names of long pepper are usually formed with an adjective “long”, e.g., Turkish *uzun biber*, Russian *dlinnyj perets* [длинный перец], Swedish *långpeppar* and French *poivre long*, all meaning plainly “long pepper”; cf. also Slovak *dlhé koreníe* “long spice” and Greek *makropeperi* [μακροππέρι] “large pepper”.

Some Indic tongues have, however, preserved two different words for long and black pepper. For example, in Urdu, long pepper is called *pipul* [پپیل], whereas black pepper may be called with an Arabic loanword, *filfil* [فلفل]. Of course, both *pipul* and *filfil* ultimately derive from the same Sanskrit name, *pippali*. Black pepper has more names in Urdu, which are formed from another Aryan root; see black pepper for details. Another example is Marathi *pimpali* [पिंपळी] “long pepper” vs. *mire*

[मिरे] “black pepper”; a similar pair exists in Gujarati: *pipari* [પીપરી] vs. *mari* [મરી].

Old European sources often had troubles to distinguish long pepper from chiles, both of which are pungent and have an elongated shape. The name *long pepper* was used for both spices in the 16th century. Apparently, in modern Farsi, the name *dar felfel* [دار فلفل] “woody pepper” may still denote either of the two, although it seems more fitting for long pepper than for chile.

Selected Links

Indian Spices: Chabika (indianetzone.com) Indian Spices: Long Pepper (indianetzone.com) Gewürz-Bazar: Langer Pfeffer Dinses Culinarium: Langer bengalischer Pfeffer Sorting *Piper* names (www.plantnames.unimelb.edu.au) Francesco Sirene: Spices & Herbs (Catalogue) Olivers and Co: Long Pepper Recipe: Ethiopian Lentils and **Berebere** [በጌጌጌጌ] (jewish-food.org) Recipe: **Berebere** [በጌጌጌጌ] Powder (hometalkers.com) Recipe: **Berebere** [በጌጌጌጌ] Powder (globalgarden.com) Recipe: **Berebere** [በጌጌጌጌ] Paste and More Ethiopian Recipes (indiajoze.com) Rezept von goccus.com: **Berebere** [በጌጌጌጌ] Rezept von goccus.com: **Niter kibbi** [ነገር ክብብ] INDU-Versand Aromates, épices et condiments du monde entier The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea Recipe: **Doro wat** [ዎሮ ወተ] (Ethiopian Chicken Stew) (recipes.chef2chef.net) Recipe: **Doro wat** [ዎሮ ወተ] (Ethiopian Chicken Stew) (fooddownunder.com) Traditional Ethiopian Wat Recipes (www.hotpaste.com) Eritrean Recipes (geocities.com) Wuerzmich.com: Langer Pfeffer Eritreische Gewürze (asmarino.de)

LONG PEPPER probably came to Europe before the now dominant black pepper. It was highly priced during the Roman Empire — about three times the price of black pepper. With its taste pungent and sweet at the same time, it was perfect for Roman cookery especially fond of these two taste sensations (see silphion for details). In our days, long pepper is nearly unknown and sometimes hard to obtain.

Since terpene components are missing from its aroma, long pepper cannot be substituted by ordinary black pepper (you may try white pepper plus a little bit of mace, though). Its hot-and-sweet taste goes well with spicy cheese specialties (it’s a “secret” of my personal cheese fondue mixture) or wine sauces.

In Asia, two different plants with exactly the same sensory properties are used: *Piper retrofractum* from Indonesia has rods a little bit smaller than *Piper longum* from India (Bengal pepper). In Western countries, mostly the latter is available.

Since long pepper is more pungent than black pepper, it must be used with care, unless you like fiery food. Crush the rods before use. In India, the main application for long pepper is its usage in spicy vegetable pickles (in Hindi, *achar* [अचार]).

Rather remarkably, long pepper is also known and popular in parts of Africa, namely in the Islâmic regions of North and East Africa, whereto it has been introduced by Arab traders. Therefore, long pepper is sometimes found in the complex spice mixtures of Morocco (*ras el hanout*, see cubeb pepper); but it is also of some importance for the cuisine of Ethiopia, where long pepper is usually found in the traditional meat stews (*wat*), mostly together with black pepper, nutmeg, cloves and turmeric; the usage of turmeric exemplifies Indian influence in Ethiopian cuisine. Popular recipes are *sigat wat* [ሰገተ ወተ], lean beef cubes braised in a spicy, thick gravy made from chiles, onions and garlic, and *doro wat* [ዎሮ ወተ], a stew of chicken and hard-boiled eggs in similar gravy. Besides rice, the main staple in East Africa is a thin leavened bread (*injera* [ጎጆ]), which is made from a local cereal, teff [ጥፎ] (*Eragrostis tef*).

Spice usage in Ethiopia parallels Indian tradition in several ways: Clarified butter (*niter kibbi* [ነገር ክብብ]) is a

common ingredient; other than Indian *ghi*, the Ethiopian version is prepared with spices and more often used as a flavouring than as a cooking medium. Also, the classical Ethiopian spice mixture *berbere* (also spelt *berebere*) resembles Indian *masalas* (see cumin) not only in its list of ingredients, but also in its preparation process which includes dry toasting of ingredients. In Ethiopia, the term *berbere* [፳፻፳፻፳፻] refers to both a coarse powder of semihot to hot chiles and to a spice mixture (“flavoured *berbere*”) which contains chiles as the main ingredient.

Berberere mixture is rather hot and traditionally used to spice mutton dishes; it is made by toasting dry chiles a few minutes until they darken and subsequent adding of long and black pepper, ginger, coriander fruits, fenugreek and a little bit of ajwain. Sweet tones are achieved by cinnamon, cardamom seeds, cloves and even allspice. Another ingredient, often omitted in recipes designed for the Western market, is rue, either in form of fresh leaves or as fresh or dried fruits.

Berberere can be made into a paste with water, wine or mead (*tej* [፳፻፳፻፳፻]); such a paste, called *awaze* or *awazi* [፳፻፳፻፳፻], is usually served as a table condiment. The paste can again be dried at elevated temperature to yield an even more aromatic spice. Some very complex *berbere* recipes consist of repeated steps of moistening and drying; the more delicate ingredient (rue leaves, basil) are added only before the last step.

Ethiopia’s small neighbour Eritrea features a related cuisine which, however, acquires a distinct character by the use of Mediterranean ingredients (e.g., *pasta*) and herbs, which had been introduced during the Italian colonial era. The basic condiment is *berbere paste* prepared similar to the Ethiopian version, but with less chile; dried onions provide the typical Eritrean flavour. Example of Eritrean foods are the chicken stew *tsebhi dorho* [፳፻፳፻፳፻] and a similar beef stew, *zigni* [፳፻፳፻፳፻]. Eritrean flat bread *ingera* [፳፻፳፻፳፻] is, as its Ethiopian counterpart, made from teff or a teff-wheat-blend, but it has a milder taste due to lesser fermentation.

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