

PP



Sichuan pepper

Szechwan, Szechuan, hua jiao

Zanthoxylum simulans



A hardy perennial that grows as a thorny bush - keep it small with pruning or let it grow larger. (Green Flowers late Aug, Red fruit follows)

Origin Japan, Korea, China. Very Hardy

- One of the spices used in Chinese five-spice powder.
- Szechuan peppercorn isn't really a pepper at all, as it consists of the pinkish-red dried outer husks of the prickly ash shrub that has a lemony, peppery aroma.
- However, its main claim to fame is the powerful numbing sensation it causes around the mouth. When married with chile peppers, chefs believe this numbing effect reduces the chili pepper's heat, leaving diners free to appreciate the capsicum's intense, fruity flavour.
- Native to southern India, Fortunately however the Szechuan peppers grow perfectly happily in most temperate areas - Fully hardy in the UK
- While not botanically related to black or white pepper, this forms a naturally untidy, deciduous, spiky bush that grows eventually to about 5m in height and width, though it is perfectly happy being pruned smaller and grown in a large pot.
- Harvesting is best done as soon as the pinky red seedcases begin to open and show their dark seed - usually as summer turns to autumn. The outer shell is where the heat and aromatics are held (the seed is usually flavourless) but pick whole florets, leave them to dry somewhere warm for a day or two, and they should be ready to go into the peppermill.
- Store the un-ground peppercorns in an airtight container away from bright sunlight until you're ready to use them; they should retain their oomph for a year or so if kept in this way.