



Zanthoxylum bungeanum with a heavy crop of Sichuan peppercorns

Spice up your garden with Sichuan Peppers

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There are a staggering 200+ *Zanthoxylum* species around the World. Many are highly prized for their culinary and medicinal qualities. They are generally grown as ornamentals in European gardens but until recently have received limited attention.

Zanthoxylums are deciduous or evergreen, aromatic herbs, shrubs or small trees, providing great Autumn interest. They are part of the *Rutaceae* family which contain the well-known citrus plants, such as lemon and orange. We have selected 6 species to grow and offer to plant hunters who don't mind adding a bit of quirkiness to their garden or patio.

The nomenclature of Zanthoxylums is complicated, especially when it comes to their common name. Several species, native to the Far East are called Sichuan (Szechuan) Pepper (Hua Jiao in Chinese), even if they are not native to Sichuan, they are all used similarly and the name "Sichuan Pepper" also refers to the spice itself.



Harvested, dried Sichuan Peppercorns (before seed separation)

Interest through four seasons

In Spring, the young shoots and leaves of some species may be bronze or even red in colour, before the composite leaves fully develop. The young, soft, often bronze coloured thorns (technically called prickles) may appear even on the leaf peduncle or on the central rib of the leaves (e.g. *Z. armatum*), giving an unusual appearance. Late Spring, greenish yellow flowers appear in cymes, but they are not fully visible among the leaves, which are highly aromatic and some species, like our Lemon Pepper (*Z. acanthopodium*) even diffuse a strong lemony scent. During the



Autumn colours on *Zanthoxylum armatum* (non evergreen)



Autumn colours on *Zanthoxylum simulans* leaves

Summer, tiny green fruits start to appear on female plants, which turn red by the start of the Autumn, and this is one of the highlights of the Sichuan Pepper: the branches are decorated with bunches of “pepper berries”, showy for several months. When they open up, they reveal the shiny black seeds, which stay attached to the branches for a long time, usually well into early Winter. The black seeds – often hanging out of the pod by a “filament” – contrast well with the red seed pods and a backdrop of spectacularly colouring foliage, turning to shades of orange, yellow and even pink and violet: all these colours may be present in the same time on one single leaf. There is something special about their look in Winter too, when the big, ageing thorns are revealed along the stems and branches, which make the old trunks of many species look like an alligator skin. They tend to develop multiple stems, are mostly shrub-like, drought tolerant and easy to grow.



Zanthoxylum acanthopodium trunk

Unique fruits

For once it's not the present concealed inside you're after but it is the wrapping – as the flavour lies in the fruit shell. And what a prize it is!

Best harvested when the husk changes to red, dry it in a cool, airy place and separate it from the seed, then grind it in a pepper mill. The husk keeps its vivid colour when dried. This spice is widely used as a culinary herb in Asia; Sichuan peppercorns commonly feature in Chinese, Tibetan, Taiwanese, Korean, Japanese and Nepalese cooking. The dried husk is used for flavouring stews, soups and meats.



Zanthoxylum acanthopodium fruits



Zanthoxylum simulans fruiting branches

The mouth numbing effects of *Zanthoxylum* have been exploited for centuries as a natural remedy to alleviate toothache and gum pain. The young shoots were even used as a toothbrush. The pericarp or outer casing (in which the shiny black seed is hiding) contains the essential oils that provide the intense numbing effect. It is like a separate, “fifth taste” called the sacred duo “ma la”= “numb and hot” for the locals and without it, they consider the dish tasteless.

In mainland China, it is one of the main ingredients of five-spice mixtures along with star anise, fennel seeds, clove, and cassia bark (cinnamon). As in other spices like coriander seeds, their flavour can be enhanced by gently roasting under a low heat which can then be added to stir-fry dishes. In the case of stews and soups, whole peppercorns wrapped inside a cheese cloth are added and removed just before serving. In parts of India, not only is the ground husk used to flavour curries, *Zanthoxylum* leaves are also cooked with fermented fish and pork.

Sichuan peppers contain many different minerals, antioxidants, and nutrients that help boost the immune system.

Get growing

We recommend planting two Sichuan Peppers together to ensure a greater harvest of fruit. Most *Zanthoxylum*s start to fruit very early, usually 2-3 years from seed. Some of the species we offer are suitable for those with the smallest gardens too and can be planted by a wall or in a border but can also be used as a patio or bonsai specimen. The aromatic bark is insect repellent and especially *Z. armatum* is well suitable for hedging (this species is often evergreen). They fruit well in pots and can be shaped to any size, tolerating drought and temperatures as low as -20°C (except *Z. acanthopodium*), grow happily in any soil type and thrive equally well in a sunny position or in a partial shady spot.



Zanthoxylum piperitum - adult size

Whether you appreciate its dried husks, its knobby bark or its strong, fresh, distinctively clean and pleasant lemony-peppery scent, *Zanthoxylum*s are here to spice up your garden!

Species/Origin / Foliage	Common names	Hardiness (+-)	Aroma (leaves and husk)	Height (m)	Fruit bunch size (approx.)
<i>Z. acanthopodium</i> (S China to Indonesia), more or less evergreen	Indonesian Wild Pepper, Lemon Pepper, Andaliman	-10C	lemony-mild peppery	2-4	3x3cm
<i>Z. armatum</i> (China-Himalayas, Pakistan, Japan, Korea), evergreen or deciduous (depending on habitat)	Winged Prickly Ash, Toothache Tree, Thorny Pepper	-20C	peppery	2-3	4x4cm
<i>Z. bungeanum</i> (China), deciduous	Sichuan Pepper	-20C	peppery	2-3	8x8cm
<i>Z. piperitum</i> (Japan, Korea), deciduous	Japanese Pepper, Korean Pepper, Sichuan Pepper	-15C	peppery	1-2	6x6cm
<i>Z. schinifolium</i> (China, Japan, Korea) deciduous	Mastic-leaf Prickly Ash, Peppertree, Sichuan Pepper	-20C	peppery-lemony	2-3	10x8cm
<i>Z. simulans</i> (China), deciduous	Chinese Pepper, Sichuan Pepper, Prickly Ash	-15 - -20C	peppery	2-4	8x8cm