

Love or Hate  
“The Pepper Tree”  
VIPR by Leo McGuire

Plant Family: Anacardiaceae, the sumac family of flowering plants has about 83 genera with a about 870 species of evergreen or deciduous trees, shrubs and vines. Large variety from pistachio and cashew to poison oak and ivy.

Genus: *Schinus*

Species: *S. 1ole*. California Pepper, Peruvian Pepper

Native to Peru’s Andean deserts. Brought to California by Missionaries.

Fast Growing evergreen tree that can grow to 50 feet tall and wide.

Long living tree. The Peruvian Pepper tree at Mission San Luis Rey de Francia, in Oceanside, was grown from seeds planted in 1830. It is the oldest Peruvian Pepper tree in California.

Not related to black pepper (*Piper nigrum*) but the pink peppercorns are often blended with commercial pepper. The fruit and leaves are potentially poisonous to poultry, pigs, and calves.

(According to the UC Davis *Safe and Poisonous Garden Plants* List, from October 2012, it is “Class 4: Dermatitis: The juice, sap, or thorns of these plants may cause a skin rash or irritation.” Has been used in traditional medicine as a wound treatment due to its antiseptic properties. The berries are also used as a textile dye.

Older trees with gnarled trunks and bright green leaves are a landscape highlight. The red berries and constant leaf drop can become overwhelming.

Tree reproduces through seed, suckers and cuttings. Sunset zones 8,9,12-24.

Once established tree handles drought, some frost and wet soil. Long periods of saturated soil can encourage rot root. Armillaria, Sooty Mold Aphids, Psyllids, Scales and Thrip can also be a problem.

Species: *S. terebinthifolia*. Brazilian Pepper, Christmas Berry

Var. *acutifolia*, pink fruit

Var. *terebinthifolia*, red fruit

Native to subtropical and tropical Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay.

Moderate growth to 30 feet height and spread.

30 years average life in landscape.

Differs from California pepper with darker green, coarser, glossy leaves that only have 5 to 13 leaflets instead of many. Sunset zones 13,14,15-17,19-24. Good in wet areas, not good with frost. Invasive rating High in Hawaii, moderately invasive in California.

UC Davis lists this tree as a “Class 2: Minor Toxicity: Ingestion of these plants may cause minor illnesses such as vomiting or diarrhea and Class 4: Dermatitis: The juice, sap, or thorns of these plants may cause a skin rash or irritation.”

Both trees are considered invasive and destructive. Sidewalks and pipes are no match to these aggressive roots. Most pest don’t like these trees. Armillaria, Root rot, Verticillium and Scales can become a problem if growing in poor conditions.

Both trees are considered invasive and destructive. Sidewalks and pipes are no match to these aggressive roots. I do not recommend planting either tree in your landscape.