

Pepper, the king of spices essay examples

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Pepper is termed the “ King of Spices.” It comes from the fruit of the flowering vine, *Piper nigrum* which originated in forests of southwest India on the Malabar coast (The Epicentre, n. d.). This vine grows best on rich, flat or gently sloping farmlands at an elevation of 1500 feet mean sea level or more. It requires a constant hot climate with regular rainfall of at least 100 inches per year. Production of pepper today is primarily from India, Brazil, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, and China, although it is cultivated in other areas of the world as well (International Pepper Community, n. d.). A plant can produce fruit (peppercorns) for up to forty years (The Epicentre, n. d.).

There are many varieties of pepper available. Peppercorns are defined by the level of ripeness, processing, and location where they are grown and exported (International Pepper Community, n. d.). Black pepper comes from the dried, unripe berry and there are several varieties. The top quality black peppers are the Malabar and Tellicherry, with the latter being a larger, more mature peppercorn. White pepper is derived from peppercorns that are riper. Their outer shell is removed by soaking in water, yielding a white color.

Green peppercorns are less ripe than the black peppercorns and they are dried quickly so their green color is retained or packed in salt water, vinegar or acidic acid. Pink pepper comes from the fruit of a non-vinuous form of the plant which is grown on the French island of Reunion (The Epicentre, n. d.).

Since prehistoric times, it has been used as a spice in India. The international trade and use of this spice dates back to the Middle Ages, when pepper was considered “ currency” it was so valuable, even being called “ black gold” (Ancient History Encyclopedia, n. d.). During these times, it was primarily

traded through Alexandria, Genoa, and Venice. Portugal later monopolized the trade around 1500. The Dutch East India Company took control over the trade in the early 1600's. The British and French entered the trading market in the 1800's, reducing the price of the spice. In the late 1700's the United States came into the trade of pepper and Boston and Salem, Massachusetts became an epicenter for the trade of this spice (IPC). Pepper is responsible for 25% of all spices traded today. (International Pepper Community, n. d.). Pepper is so desirable because of its variety of uses. It is used mostly as a food seasoning, with black pepper being the most aromatic, pungent and hot. White pepper is less aromatic and less pungent, but it has an important application in white sauces and soups. Green peppercorns have a fresher, less hot flavor and are used not only as a flavoring, but as a garnish. Pink peppercorns are particularly used in fish, poultry, and vegetable dishes (The Epicentre, n. d.). In addition to the culinary use of pepper, it is also used as a natural preservative for meat. It also has medicinal uses in Asian traditional and Western herbal medicine in therapies for a myriad of digestive issues , circulation, and arthritis (Natural Standard, 2011).

Considering the historical impact of pepper as well as its significant worldwide usage for culinary and medicinal uses, it is understandable that it is called the " King of Spices" and reigns as the " master spice" ever since it started to be used over 4, 000 years ago (The Epicentre, n. d.).

References

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