

Amomum subulatum



Family: Zingiberaceae

Local/common names:

Large Cardamom, Greater Indian Cardamom, Nepal Cardamom, Aindri, Sthula ela, Brihatupakunchika, Bari elaichi

Trade name: Large Cardamom

Profile:

The botanical species name *subulatum* is derived from Latin *subula* meaning “awl”, referring probably to the awl-shaped and pointed leaves. Large cardamom has a fresh and distinct aroma. By virtue of the traditional drying procedure over open flames, the spice also acquires a strong smoky flavour. Several species of the genus *Amomum* are distributed all over the mountainous area from the Himalayas to Southern China. In India, large cardamom has a special field of application and although green and large cardamoms are frequently interchangeable, the black variety is considered superior for spicy and rustic dishes while green cardamom is much preferred in Mughal cuisine with its subtle blend of sweet fragrances. Large Cardamom is one of the main cash crops cultivated in the sub-Himalayan state of Sikkim and Darjeeling district of West Bengal covering an area of about 30,000 ha. It is also cultivated in parts of Uttaranchal, some other northeastern states and in Nepal and Bhutan.

Habitat and ecology: The species grows on shaded slopes and inhabits cool forest areas near mountain streams and damp forest floors. It grows fast and vigorously during the summer monsoon months. *A. subulatum* is native to the eastern Himalayas. The species is mainly available in Nepal, Bhutan, Darjeeling district of West Bengal and Sikkim.

Morphology: It is a tall, perennial herb, with leafy stems. The cluster of stems grows up to 1.5 m tall. The leaves are found on the upper portion of the stem. This is an evergreen plant with the old stems dying down after a few years. The rhizomes are dull red in colour. Flower buds appear in spring from the base of the rhizome. The peduncle is short and the buds are encased in tight red bracts. The flowers appear from spring through mid summer. Individual flowers stay open for three days and more new ones open successively. An inflorescence stays in flower for over a month.

Distinguishing features: It can be distinguished by its black, rough-coated fruit, which is brownish-black in colour.

Life cycle: Flowering and fruiting takes place during the span of about 5 months i.e., between April-August.

Uses: Medicinally, the seeds are credited with stimulant, stomachic, alexipharmic and astringent properties and are prescribed for the treatment of indigestion, vomiting, biliousness, abdominal pains and rectal diseases. The oil from the seeds is aromatic, stimulant, anti-inflammatory and it is highly active against growth of keratinophilic fungi. An extract from the seeds is useful for inflamed eyelids. The seeds are an aphrodisiac and also used in gonorrhoea and in neuralgia in large doses. The ripe fruits on drying are used as a strongly flavoured spice.

Market rate: It is sold at Rs.140/- per kg in the Indian market.