

# *Bunium persicum*



**Family:**  
Umbelliferae/Apiaceae

**Local/common names:** Kala-jirah (Lahaul), Krishnajeerak

**Trade name:** Kala- jirah

**Profile:**

*Bunium persicum* or black cumin as it is commonly called, is an erect, biennial, profusely branched herb. The Hindi name, *shaahi jeera*, means imperial cumin, referring to its extensive use in Mughal cuisine. The plant is usually 20-70 cm high, with globular tuberous roots. The plant is domesticated as a biennial summer crop in the hills and its fruits are used as a spice.

**Habitat and ecology:** This plant is widely distributed in the temperate region. It is common on gentle exposed mountain slopes and dry scrubby slopes in the northwest Himalayas at an altitudinal range of 2300-3800 m. The plant generally occurs in Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. In Himachal Pradesh, it is commonly found in the districts of Chamba, Kinnaur and Lahaul and Spiti.

**Morphology:** *Bunium* is an erect herb with tuberous roots. The leaves are 2-3-pinnatisect, with filiform segments. The lower leaves are petiolate whereas the upper leaves are sessile. The flowers are white in color with 8-20 unequal ray florets and the fruits are slender, crescent shaped, 3-4 cm long, dark brown in colour and have a characteristic aroma.

**Distinguishing features:** *Bunium* has leaves that are 2-3 pinnatisect with filiform segments. The flowers have 8-20 unequal ray florets. The fruit pedicels are thin.

**Life cycle:** Flowering and fruiting of the plant occurs between June-September.

**Uses:** The roots can be eaten both raw as well as cooked and taste like sweet chestnuts. The seeds are used as a flavouring agent for various products. The powdered fruits and its decoction are regarded as a stimulant and carminative and is also used to treat abdominal pain, loss of appetite, fever, diarrhoea and piles.

**Market rate:** Commercially only a small quantity is collected and sold in the market. The market rate is Rs.35-55/- per kg.