

SANSHŌ adds a fresh, peppery, citrusy accent to food.



SANSHŌ comes to table in many forms:

Kinomé (pepper leaf) leaves on *sanshō* shrub
(Japanese prickly ash; *Zanthoxylum piperitum*), left

Sanshō no hana (yellow flowers), center top

Sanshō no mi (immature green berries; peppercorns), center middle

Wari-Zanshō (mature, split peppercorns revealing black seeds), center bottom

Kona-zanshō (powder), right top in mini-can, right bottom in paper packet

The **SANSHŌ** plant has both male and female counterparts. Both produce leaves (**kinomé**) though the leaves from the male plants are more tender than those from the female plants.

Only the females bear fruit (produce **sanshō no mi** berries). The male trees flower between April and May (producing **sanshō no hana**), and their pollen fertilizes the female flowers, which then bear fruit (**sanshō no mi**) in early summer (late May, June). Flowers are best harvested as buds. Mature **sanshō no mi** is red (late summer); the berries are allowed to dry on the tree until the husks split (**wari-zanshō**) to reveal black seeds. The black seeds are discarded, but their husks are thoroughly dried and then crushed to make **kona-zanshō** (*sanshō* powder). Green *sanshō* powder is made from dried IMMATURE fruit (*sanshō no mi*) and flowers.

The leaves, flowers, and fruits of **sanshō** are all consumed (as food), the tree branches are used to make pestles (*surikogi*) for mortars (*suribachi*).



Sanshō no mi
(immature green berries; peppercorns)

Green **sanshō no mi** berries are plucked late in May or early June. Fresh **sanshō no mi** berries are difficult to source in markets outside Japan. However, if there is any way of obtaining fresh **sanshō no mi**, I urge you to do so. Fresh berries possess an extraordinary aroma and tongue-tingling spiciness (citrus, pepper). Fresh berries freeze well raw (no need to blanch them first).

Preserved **sanshō no mi** berries, both brined and soy-stewed, are often available in many overseas markets. They are usually packaged in glass jars, though some are in vacuum-sealed packets (transfer the contents to a clean glass jar after opening and refrigerate).



Kinomé (pepper leaf)

Each sprig of **kinomé** (pepper leaf) has about 7 or 8 tiny leaves attached to a central branch. These tender young sprigs appear on **sanshō** (prickly ash) shrubs early in the spring. The tiny leaves are sometimes pulled from the branch and crushed with sweet light miso to make a thick sauce for bamboo shoots, another springtime delicacy. If you can source fresh **kinomé**, rinse in cold water, then place several on the open palm of one hand. Slap them with your other hand to release the wonderful aroma. Store any extra sprigs (unslapped) in moist paper towel in a closed plastic bag in the refrigerator. Use within a day or two. They do not freeze well.



Kona-zanshō (powdered fragrant pepper)

This is the most commonly available form of aromatic, spicy **sanshō** pepper. It typically comes to market packaged in small glass bottles (peek inside and it is a coarse powder), though recently in mills that can grind the cracked berries as you use them.