

## 234. MYRISTICA FRAGRANS Houtt. (MYRISTICACEAE) — Mace, Nutmeg



The well-known spices nutmeg and mace yield an essential oil used for flavoring foods and liqueurs. Alcoholic extracts of nutmeg are bactericidal, aqueous extracts kill cockroaches, while the volatile oils from the leaf are herbicidal. Myristicin enhances the toxicity of pyrethrum to house flies. In Ayurvedic documents nutmeg was called madashaunda, a term meaning “narcotic fruits”. Betel chewers in India often add nutmeg, and it is also added to chewing tobaccos and snuffs. The pericarp of the fruit is used for jellies and pickles. Juice from the pericarp is an efficacious mordant for fixing dyes. Both nutmeg and mace are used as spices in many American and exotic dishes.

**Nutmeg** — On the Island of Banda, a pap is made of the bark preserved with sugar and tasting like sour apples. The bark is pickled in brine in Java but tends to induce sleep. Dried seed grated to flavor milk dishes, cakes, punches, possets, and vegetables, such as cabbage, cauliflower, and spinach. Recovered pericarp is used for sweet dishes. Oil of nutmeg is distilled for external medicine and perfumes. Nutmeg butter, derived from broken seeds and poor-grade mace, is used in medicinal ointments, suppositories, and perfumery. Four or five grams of myristicin, a narcotic, produce toxic symptoms in man. Nutmeg, taken as a psychotropic, often causes reactions similar to those of other hallucinogenic drugs quite unlike the classic account of myristica poisoning. Myristicin alone does not give the reaction, but eating the whole seed does. “stirred into a glass of cold water, a penny matchbox full of nutmeg had the kick of three or four reefers” (Malcolm X, as quoted by Schleiffer).<sup>63</sup>

**Mace** — Dried ground aril is used to flavor savory dishes, pickles, and ketchups. Fruits are sometimes gathered before maturing to make jelly. Peel of the fruit, in the tender stage, provides an aromatic pickling material. Oil, distilled from the leaves, has a spicy, aromatic, pleasant flavor; used in making toilet and medicinal products, as a flavoring essence, and in chewing gum.