

Black pepper is native to SouthEast Asia and China, and is extensively cultivated there. Dried ground pepper has been used for both its flavour and as a medicine. Black pepper is the world's most traded spice.

Peppercorns are often categorised under a label describing their origin. Two types come from India's Malabar Coast: Malabar pepper and Tellicherry pepper. Tellicherry is a pepper made from fruits from the grafted Malabar plants grown on Mount Tellicherry.

Black pepper was a well-known and widespread, if expensive, seasoning in the Roman Empire. Its exorbitant price during the Middle Ages—and the monopoly on the trade held by Italy—was one of the inducements which led the Portuguese to seek a sea route to India. In 1498, Vasco da Gama became the first person to reach India by sailing around Africa.

Black Pepper (or perhaps long pepper) was believed to cure illness such as constipation, diarrhea, earache, gangrene, heart disease, hernia, hoarseness, indigestion, insect bites, insomnia, joint pain, liver problems, lung disease, oral abscesses, sunburn, tooth decay, and toothaches. Black pepper, either powdered or its decoction, is widely used in traditional Indian medicine and as a home remedy for relief from sore throat, throat congestion, cough etc.

Pepper gets its spicy heat mostly from the piperine compound, which is found both in the outer fruit and in the seed.

Pepper loses flavour and aroma through evaporation, so airtight storage helps preserve pepper's original spiciness longer. Pepper can also lose flavour when exposed to light, which can transform piperine into nearly tasteless isochavicine.

Once ground, pepper's aromatics can evaporate quickly; most culinary sources recommend grinding whole peppercorns immediately before use for this reason. Handheld pepper mills or grinders, which mechanically grind or crush whole peppercorns, are used for this, sometimes instead of pepper shakers, dispensers of pre-ground pepper. Spice mills such as pepper mills were found in European kitchens as early as the 14th century, but the mortar and pestle used earlier for crushing pepper have remained a popular method for centuries after as well

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pepper_corns