

Bloedel Plant Profile – True Cinnamon



The spice cinnamon grows as the inner bark of the cinnamon tree. Peeling the outer bark away from a cut branch gives a cinnamon stick. Harvesting branches does not kill the tree. Bloedel Conservatory has a tall, thin tree of the best quality cinnamon, known as True Cinnamon. It is near the first bend after the bridge, close to the Brazilian Jelly Palm, the Trumpet Tree and the Fishtail Parlour Palm. Bamboo canes help to support it.



True Cinnamon tree supported by bamboo canes



The shape of the glossy leaves of True Cinnamon will be familiar if you have grown an avocado. Cinnamon and avocado are both members of the laurel family or Lauraceae.

Names

True cinnamon first came from the island of Ceylon and had the name “Ceylon cinnamon”, or in Latin *Cinnamomum zeylanicum*. In 1972, Ceylon became a republic with the name of Sri Lanka. Even though the island tea is still “Ceylon tea”, the cinnamon became “True cinnamon” with the Latin name of *Cinnamomum verum*. All of these names are in use.

Do We Eat True Cinnamon?

Cinnamomum verum is “True cinnamon”, but most traded cinnamon, over 90%, is from related species. *Cinnamomum aromaticum*, or ‘cassia’, describes cinnamon from Indonesia, China and Vietnam. This is mainly from the species *C. burmannii* (Indonesia), *C. cassia* (China), and *C. loureiroi* (Vietnam). In 2011 Sri Lanka, ranked fourth in world production with 8% of the total cinnamon. This amount was 80% - 90% of world *C. verum* production.

C. verum is the best quality, generally sold as thin ‘quills’ – rolled pieces of inner bark. This may be ground at home. Quills of *C. burmannii* are thicker, and can damage a home grinder.

C. Cassia and *C. loureiroi* are too brittle to be rolled, and are sold as pieces. All powdered forms look similar, but testing with iodine solution shows far more starch (blue result) in cassia.

Coumarin

As well as starch, cassia also has much greater amounts of coumarin, which may harm the liver. It occurs in many plants and gives the scent of fresh-cut grass. Cassia cinnamon contains around 25,000 times more coumarin than True cinnamon.¹ Another source says it is only 1,200 times more common.² All sources agree that True cinnamon has negligible amounts of it. The US does not regulate the amount of coumarin in cinnamon, though the European Union has set safe daily limits – and just one teaspoon of cassia cinnamon could send you over.

Production

At two years, the young tree is cut and coppiced, to a stump³. New growth shoots emerge the next year. Growers cut these shoots to remove and process the inner bark.⁴ Each tree will yield cinnamon for 40-50 years.

¹ <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170620-the-delicious-flavour-with-a-toxic-secret>

² <https://www.ceylon-cinnamon.com/Identify-Ceylon-Cinnamon.html>

³ <http://science.howstuffworks.com/life/botany/cinnamon1.htm>

⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/07/south_asia_sri_lanka0s_spice_of_life/html/1.stm