
Ó American Botanical Council

HerbClip

FILE: Star Anise

(*Illicium verum* & *I. anisatum*)

Date: January 21, 1997

HC 1-21-7-2

Re: **Confusion of Edible and Toxic Star Anise**

Small, Ernest. Confusion of common names for toxic and edible “star anise” (*Illicium*) species. *Economic Botany*, Vol. 50, No. 3, 1996, pp. 337-339.

Several guides to health and medicinal plants are perpetuating confusion between the toxic and edible *Illicium* species. The common name “star anise” is being used to refer to the edible *Illicium verum* Hook. f. and the poisonous *I. anisatum* L. The common names “Chinese star anise” and “Japanese star anise” are also being used in contradictory ways. Because both species have commercial uses, the confusion is particularly disturbing. The fruits of these two species are quite similar in appearance, and the species have often been confused for one another.

Indigenous to southern China and Indochina, the dried fruits of *I. verum* are used as a condiment and medicinally as a stimulant and carminative. The seeds of *I. verum* are valued in industry for their essential oil content, used to flavor liqueurs. In the U.S. the plant has the regulatory status of GRAS (Generally Regarded As Safe) for culinary uses. The seeds of *I. anisatum*, also indigenous to southeastern Asia, are poisonous and have been used as a fish poison. Nevertheless, they are also used in traditional Chinese medicine, to treat toothache and dermatitis for example. Although no poisonings have been reported due to confusion between the two plants, the potential exists, especially because both have reputations as medicinal plants. To avoid ambiguity and confusion, the scientific nomenclature should be used when referring to these plants. —*Ginger Webb*

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