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Occurrence of *Psidium guineense* Sw. (Myrtaceae) – A lesser known edible fruit plant from Peninsular India

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Abstract

The occurrence of *Psidium guineense* Sw. (Myrtaceae) is been reported from Kerala, South India which has been wrongly treated as *P. guajava* L. by many authors. A detailed description of the species, illustration and an artificial key for the identification of Indian species of *Psidium* are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Psidium, a tropical American genus of over 100 species is mostly represented by evergreen trees or shrubs with edible berries (Mabberley, 1990). Three species were introduced in India, viz., *P. guajava* L. (Yellow guava/Apple guava), *P. cattleyanum* Sabine (Strawberry guava/China guava), and *P. guineense* Sw. (Guinea guava), of which *P. guajava* was introduced long back by the Portugunese (Mehra, 1966). It is grown in many parts of India. *P. cattleyanum* is less common and often grown in gardens and *P. guineense* is a little known species. Deb (1961) first reported this species from Agarthala (Tripura state) in India and thereafter there has been no report of this species from any part of the country.

During the course of studies on the wild edible fruit resources of Kerala, the author could locate and collect this species from the secondary deciduous forests and some house premises of Kerala. Many authors have wrongly treated it as *Psidium guajava*. Although this species is locally called *Kattupera* as it is found growing wild (*kattu* = wild, *pera* = guava), though it is not a native species. It is a Guinean species introduced in Kerala. Since it fruits in great profusion like grapes, it is also called *munthiripera* (*munthiri* = grape, *pera* = guava). This species is also known to occur in Sri Lanka (Ashton, 1981).

An artificial key is given to distinguish *P. guineense* from the allied species in India along with brief descriptions and illustrations of the species for easy identification. The live accessions are nurtured in the fruit plants conservatory at the Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

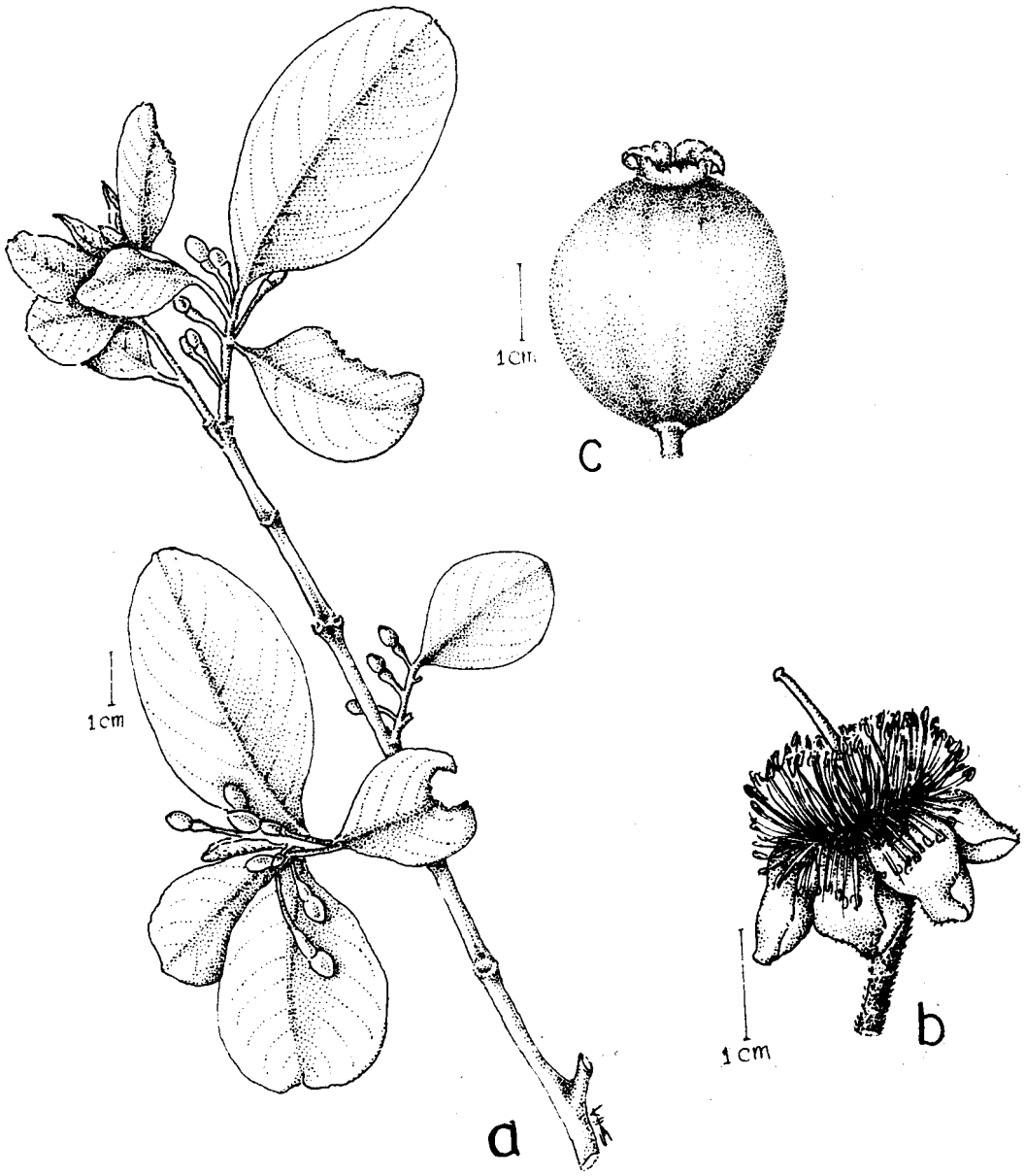

Fig. 1. *Psidium guineense* Sw.: a. Flowering twig; b. Flower; c. Fruit

Occurrence of *Psidium guineense* Sw. in Peninsular India

Key to the species

1a. Leaves pubescent, nerves prominent 2

2a. Branchlets 4-angled; mature fruits more than 3 cm in diameter ..... *P. guajava*

2b. Branchlets terete; mature fruits less than 3 cm in diameter ..... *P. guineense*

1b. Leaves glabrous, nerves obscure ..... *P. cattleyanum*

Psidium guineense Sw., Prodr. Veg. Ind. Occ. 77. 1788; DC., Prod. 3: 235. 1828; Mc Vaugh, Publ. Field Mus. Nat. Hist., Bot. Ser., 13, Pt. 4, No. 2, 796, 1958; Deb, Bull. Bot. Surv. India 3(8): 87. 1961; Fosberg, Ceylon J. Sci., Biol. Sci. 9(2): 60. 1971; Ashton in Dassanayake & Fosberg (Eds.), Rev. Handb. Fl. Ceylon 2: 407. 1981 (Fig. 1).

Shrubs, 1-5 m tall, branchlets terete, pubescent. Leves subcoriaceous, broadly elliptic-oblong, 8-10 cm, pellucid dotted, entire, pubescent beneath, lateral veins 8-10 pairs, looping; petiole 1-1.5 cm long. Flowers slightly fragrant; calyx tube adnate to the ovary, imperfectly 5-lobed, green, pubescent without; petals 5, caducous, white, spathulate, 1.5 x 1 cm; stamens c. 200, white; filaments 1-1.2 cm long; anthers oblong, 0.1-0.5 cm long, introrse, dehiscing longitudinally; ovary many-celled with many ovules in each locule; style 1.3 cm long, white, stigma capitate. Berry globose, 2-3 cm diam., pubescent, yellow when ripe; seeds many, embedded in the creamy-yellow flesh.

Habitat: Occasional in the secondary deciduous forests and disturbed deciduous forests up to 1000 m elevation.

Flowering and fruiting: January – October.

Ethnobotanical uses: Ripe fruits are edible and also good for making jam and jellies. Thanaka (1976), Hedrick (1972) and Verheij and Coronel (1992) also have pointed out the edible property of its fruits.

Specimens examined: INDIA, **Kerala**: Trivandrum Dist., Palode, *Nazarudeen 14368*; Ponmudi, *Nazarudeen 14874* (TBGT).

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