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36. CUMINUM Linnaeus, Sp. Pl. 1: 254. 1753.

孜然芹属 zi ran qin shu

Pu Fading (溥发鼎 Pu Fa-ting); Mark F. Watson

Herbs, annual, glaucescent throughout, glabrous except the setulose fruit. Taproot slender. Stem erect, slender, profusely branched. Basal leaves petiolate, base with narrow membranous wing; blade 2-ternate; ultimate segments filiform. Leaves reduced upwards, becoming sessile. Umbels lax, terminal and lateral; bracts and bracteoles several, similar to leaves but more cartilaginous, apex subulate, persistent; rays and pedicels very unequal. Calyx teeth subulate, conspicuous, unequal, persistent in fruit. Petals white or pinkish, obovate or oblong, base cuneate, with a small inflexed lobule. Stylopodium conic, attenuate into styles; styles short, reflexed. Fruit oblong-ellipsoid, slightly laterally compressed; primary and secondary ribs prominent, setulose; vittae 1 in each furrow under secondary ribs, 2 on commissure. Seed face slightly concave. Carpophore 2-parted

Four species: N Africa, C and SW Asia, Mediterranean region, North America; one species (introduced) in China.

1. Cuminum cyminum Linnaeus, Sp. Pl. 1: 254. 1753.

孜然芹 zi ran qin

Plants 10–30(–50) cm. Basal petioles 1–2 cm, sheaths lanceolate, margins white and membranous; blade 3–8 × 2–7 cm; ultimate divisions long-filiform, 15–60 × 0.4–0.7 mm. Umbels many, 2–3 cm across; peduncles 3–10 cm; bracts 2–6(–8), linear or linear-lanceolate, 10–50 × 0.5–1.2 mm, unequal, entire or apex 2–3-fid, usually longer than the rays, margins membranous; rays (1–)3–6, 3–20 mm, rather stout, very unequal; bracteoles 3–5, similar to bracts, 4–10 × 0.3–0.6 mm, very unequal, sometimes reflexed; umbellules 3–8-flowered; pedicels 3–6 mm, stout, very unequal. Calyx teeth 0.5–2 mm, longer than the styles. Petals ca. 1.4 × 1 mm. Fruit 5–7 × 1.6–2.8 mm; primary ribs short setulose, secondary ribs densely stellate setulose. Fl. and fr. Feb–Jun(–Sep).

Cultivated. Xinjiang [possibly native to SW Asia and the Mediterranean region].

The aromatic fruits (cumin) are used as a flavoring, to aid digestion, and are of reputed medicinal value. This species is widely cultivated in favorable climates outside its presumed native range. It readily escapes and becomes more or less naturalized locally in many areas.

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