Pepper - the oldest and still most important culinary condiment known to man. Of the 1,200 species of *Piper*, a genus native to the tropics, around 400 have been recorded from Malesia. *Piper nigrum*, the most commonly cultivated, is native to India. Pepper was brought to South-east Asia by Hindu monks around 2000 years ago. In the Middle Ages, *P. nigrum* and Chilli peppers slowly replaced other types of pepper.
The ensuing quest for new, cheaper sources of pepper swept the Europeans into a frenzy of exploration later to be known as “The Age of Discovery”. Japanese settlers introduced pepper plants to Brazil in the 1930s; the country still maintains a major share in the global market today.
Today pepper is a sophisticated, versatile spice: black peppercoms - mature but unripe fruits, sun-dried to turn them black; strongest in pungency and flavour; white peppercoms - ripe berries, red outer skin is removed revealing the white seed that is bleached in the sun; milder in flavour; red peppercoms - ripe berries with outer skin intact; rare and expensive; and green peppercoms - plucked unripe, brined, pickled, freeze-dried or dehydrated; flavour and pungency is less than white peppercoms. Pink pepper and other condiments using the term pepper, are not related to the true peppers, but used in similar ways.