

## Plant of the Week

# Coffee — from berries of the *Coffea* shrub

**Coffee** is produced from a number of species of the genus *Coffea*. The most popular, *Coffea arabica*, commonly known as ‘**Arabica coffee**’, comes from the highlands of Ethiopia and Sudan, and possibly northern Kenya. The less popular but hardier *Coffea canephora* (syn. *Coffea robusta*), which is known as ‘**Robusta coffee**’, is native to western and central Africa, from Guinea to Uganda and southern Sudan<sup>1</sup>. However, coffee is now grown in tropical and subtropical regions around the world. You may be surprised to know that coffee is the second most traded commodity in the world after oil<sup>2</sup>.

It is believed that coffee was probably first consumed in Ethiopia but the earliest record of coffee drinking comes from Yemen in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Later, coffee drinking spread to Italy, then through Europe, to Indonesia and the Americas<sup>1</sup>. Green berries are produced on the coffee bushes, ripening after about 7 to 9 months to red then black. The berries are fermented to remove the outer, fleshy layers and the remaining seed is dried then later roasted. *Coffea* belongs to the plant family **Rubiaceae**, a widespread group recorded in the fossil history from the Eocene, ~34 million years ago<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup>Wikipedia:  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coffee>

<sup>2</sup>TradeCommodities.co.uk

**Text and photographs: Alison  
Downing and Kevin Downing,  
Biological Sciences, 5 June 2011.**