

1. BOTANICAL.

The family Dioscoraceae includes nine genera and some two hundred and twenty-five species (2). Of these the great majority belong to the genus Dioscorea which includes all the cultivated species of yam. The distribution of the hundred and fifty species of Dioscorea is extremely wide and although most are found within the tropics, some occur outside these limits. Only ten or twelve species are of importance as food, and it is probable that three quarters of the total species in cultivation are included in not more than five or six species (3).

The classification and nomenclature of the species of Dioscorea are very unsatisfactory and the systems vary greatly with different authorities. That generally adopted is given by Merrill (25) a summary of whose arrangements is given below.