

Alfalfa Leaf Class



Alfalfa Leaf

- *Medicago sativa*, or more commonly known as alfalfa, is a plant within the pea family Fabaceae. This perennial plant can also be called lucerne. Alfalfa is most commonly known and used for being grown as animal feed. The word alfalfa actually derives from an Arabic phrase “al-fac-facah” which means “father of all foods.” Besides *medicago sativa* and lucerne, alfalfa can also be known by many other names including “sickle medick”, “mielga”, and in Chinese “zi mu xu”. Alfalfa use dates back to over 6,000 years ago, with evidence of alfalfa remains found in Iran. It is believed that alfalfa was first domesticated during the Bronze Age, around 1000 to 2000 BCE, around the countries of Iran, Turkmenistan, and Turkey. Early Turkish writings dating back to 1300 B.C. mention alfalfa, and it is believed that it was first being grown in Europe around 400 BCE. Did you know that alfalfa has been used in money spells? It’s believed to bring financial abundance and combat poverty. It is also believed that by being placed in a jar around your house, it will protect you from hunger.
- Alfalfa is a perennial plant that actually resembles clover. Depending on the climate and variety of plant, alfalfa normally lives for about four to eight years, but it can also live up to twenty. It grows to a height of about three feet, and has a very deep system of roots that can stretch up to 49 feet. It has leguminous flowers that can vary in color from yellow to purple, as well as trifoliate leaves (meaning three leaves) along its stem.
- Alfalfa can be used in many different products and industries. It can be used for skin care, bath and body products, medicinal purposes, culinary purposes, hair care, and soap making. Common products that can include alfalfa are shampoos and conditioners, soaps, ointments, lotions, creams, scrubs, bath salts, bath teas, bath bombs, foot treatments, face tonics, body wash, massage oils, and facial masks. Did you know that George Washington and Thomas Jefferson actually grew alfalfa? Many early United States colonists actually grew alfalfa, however it was not widely cultivated in the U.S. until the California Gold Rush of 1849 because it was mainly just used for animal feed.



Growing Conditions



- Because of its huge root system, alfalfa is an extremely adaptable plant and is very drought-resistant. It actually grows best when planted in an area without too much moisture and with full sun exposure. It needs to be in soil that easily drains and with a pH level of about 6.8 to 7.5. Because it is so adaptable, it can be planted during different times of the year depending on the climate. If it is planted in a cooler climate, it is best to be planted during the spring time. For warmer climates, it is best to plant alfalfa during the fall time.
- With its large root system, alfalfa does not need to be planted very deeply. The seeds should only be planted about half of an inch deep, with a light layer of soil on top. The actual plant will begin to sprout and grow within 7 to 10 days of being planted. Alfalfa can have overcrowding problems once it starts to grow, so once it reaches a height of about 6 to 12 inches, it can start to be thinned out. The time to harvest the plant will depend on the reason for its use. When being used for animal feed, it should be harvested and baled before it starts to flower because it is more difficult for animals to digest once it flowers. Depending on the number of animals it will be used as feed for will determine the size of the bales. For individual horses or small animals, it will just be put into small square bales. For big cattle ranches, it will be put into large round bales about 4 to 6 feet in diameter. However for dairy cattle, the alfalfa is actually finely chopped and put into silos or bags so that it can ferment. This process allows the alfalfa to retain higher nutrient levels than dry alfalfa and is actually easier for the dairy cattle to eat. If not being used as animal feed, alfalfa can be harvested after its flowers have bloomed.
- There are some pests and diseases that can affect alfalfa growth. It is susceptible to many root rots, such as the Texas Root Rot. Pests that can affect alfalfa include the potato leafhopper, aphids, army worms, and the alfalfa weevil. These can all seriously reduce and threaten the plants growth. There is also a stem nematode that can weaken and infect the stems of the plant.

Uses in Industries

Food

- Alfalfa does have a sweet, bitter taste to it. Alfalfa sprouts can be eaten in sandwiches and salads. Alfalfa is actually very high in protein and some vegetarians eat it as an alternative protein source. Its leaves can also be cooked or eaten raw as a vegetable. Many dieters use alfalfa to help them curb their cravings and suppress their appetite, which helps them to eventually lose weight.

Bath and Body Products

- Alfalfa can be used for many different products and industries. Besides its culinary purposes, alfalfa can also be used for hair care, skin care, bath and body products, medicinal purposes, and for soap making. When used in soaps, it works as a natural colorant, bringing a natural green color to the soap. It also provides the skin with many healing properties and nutrients.
- There are many wonderful skin care benefits to using alfalfa. It is rich in enzymes and Vitamin A which help to keep the skin glowing and healthy. The Vitamin A also works to improve skin texture and complexion and helps to heal dry skin. It also works to detoxify and cleanse the skin and body of any impurities. Additionally, since it is rich in vitamins E and K, as well as amino acids, it can aid in fading stretch marks.
- For hair care, alfalfa is rich in Vitamins B1 and B6, which work to keep the hair healthy and encourage new hair growth. It also helps to treat hair loss and baldness, increases the oxygen intake to your hair, helps to improve blood circulation in the scalp, and reduces hair loss.



Uses in Industries Cont.



Medicinal

- There are many amazing medicinal benefits to using alfalfa. It contains many important vitamins and nutrients such as Vitamins B1, B6, C, A, E, D, K, calcium, biotin, potassium, magnesium, iron, folic acid, zinc, carotene, niacin, and phosphorous. It has very high levels of protein, as well as amino acids.
- In traditional Ayurvedic medicine, alfalfa leaves were used for treating digestion problems, ulcers, water retention and arthritis, and a cooling poultice was made from its seeds to treat boils. In Chinese medicine, alfalfa leaves have been used to relieve the pain caused by ulcers as well as stimulate the appetite. Colonial Americans even used alfalfa as treatment for conditions like arthritis, scurvy, urinary problems, and even menstrual pains.
- Alfalfa can be used to help reduce cholesterol levels, and to treat asthma, diabetes, upset stomachs, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, prostate conditions, bladder conditions, and even some bleeding disorders. It also helps to regulate and stimulate stomach secretions, calm the nervous system, and even can work as a mild laxative.
- In the 19th century, herbal physicians ground alfalfa and used it to treat and soothe insect bites. In traditional European medicine, alfalfa was used to help support bowel and urinary functions.
- For women, alfalfa can work as an estrogen replacement and helps to increase breast milk production for women who are nursing. It also helps to treat symptoms of menopause such as hot flashes, low estrogen levels, and night sweats.
- It also helps to aid the thyroid to function properly, relaxes muscles, and even works as an anti-tumor remedy. Alfalfa contains an amino acid called canavanine, that works to prevent cancer.
- Alfalfa even works as diuretic, helping to prevent urinary tract infections and other kidney disorders. It also helps to prevent bleeding, anemia, blood poisoning, fatigue, loss of energy, loss of memory, dental problems, edema, rheumatism, varicose ulcers, and even split ends of hair and brittle nails.

Other Uses

- Around the 1850s, Native Americans referred to alfalfa as “Buffalo Grass.” They ground the seeds into flour and used it as an ingredient in bread and gruels.
- Besides being used to increase milk production in nursing mothers, alfalfa can also increase milk production in dairy cows.
- Nature’s Garden sells [alfalfa leaf powder](#) for external use only. We do not sell it as a food item. The information above talks about how great alfalfa is for many industries, however we only sell it for external use. We provide this data for educational purposes only. Nothing in this article is to be construed as medical advice. Please consult your doctor before using this product or any of this information for treatment purposes.
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