



Alfalfa

DID YOU KNOW?



Alfalfa has deep roots. Believe it or not, miners in Nevada once found alfalfa roots 40 meters (129 ft) down into the soil!

ORIGINS

Alfalfa is native to Asia, Europe, and North Africa. The Medians, who lived in what is today Iraq and Iran, grew alfalfa 3,300 years ago.



Alfalfa is sometimes called "Queen of Forages" because it is the oldest known plant used to feed animals.

CLASSIFYING ALFALFA

Alfalfa belongs to the legume family.

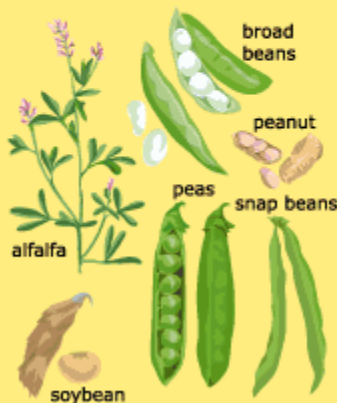


nodules

All legumes have their seeds in pods. Many legumes have root nodules where special bacteria, called Rhizobia, live. These bacteria can take nitrogen from the air and change it into a form that plants can use.

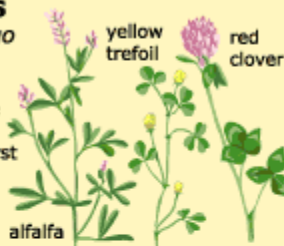
FAMILY Fabaceae (Legume Family)

There are about 18,000 species in the legume family, which includes peas, beans, clover, and peanuts.



GENUS *Medicago*

In Latin, "medica" means native of Media. Alfalfa was first grown by the Medians.



SPECIES *sativa*

In Latin, "sativa" means that which is sown.



THE ALFALFA PLANT

Alfalfa grows to about 1 meter (about 3 ft) high.

The purple flowers are grouped at the ends of stems.



Leaves have three leaflets.

Pods are curled.

Alfalfa has one long taproot with many side branches.

GROWING ALFALFA

If you are not using a section of your garden, you can plant alfalfa to protect and improve your soil.

Sow in spring or summer. Sprinkle 2-3 grams of seeds per square meter (about 1 oz. per 12 square yards). Do not allow the alfalfa to grow for more than a year or it will be difficult to dig up. Turn it under and allow it to decay for six weeks before planting crops.

When I turn this alfalfa under, it will add lots of organic matter and nitrogen to my soil.



USES

Alfalfa is not only grown for animal food. Many people eat alfalfa sprouts in salads. Some people even eat the leaves, either cooked or raw.



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