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.

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.

CLASSIFYING ALFALFA
Alfalfa belongs to the legume family. 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)

pea
broad beans
peanut
snap beans

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.

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

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

Sow in spring or summer. Sprinkle 2-3 grams of seeds per square meter (about 1 oz. per 12 sq. 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.

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.
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Across
5. Alfalfa was first grown by the _______.
7. All legumes have their seeds in _______.
9. Alfalfa has one very long _______.
10. Planting legumes can add _______ to the soil.

Down
1. Alfalfa is the oldest known plant used to feed _______.
2. Alfalfa belongs to the _______ family.
3. The scientific name for alfalfa is _______ sativa.
4. To improve your soil, you can grow alfalfa for not more than one _______ and then turn it under.
6. People eat alfalfa _______ in salads.
8. Alfalfa leaves have _______ leaflets.

INVESTIGATE THE RISKS OF EATING RAW ALFALFA SPROUTS

Have you ever eaten raw alfalfa sprouts in your salad? You can find them in grocery stores. You can also sprout your own by keeping the seeds damp and well rinsed. In about 3 days they will sprout tiny leaves and roots.

However, you should be aware of the risks of eating raw sprouts, whether they are store-bought or home grown. They may contain bacteria that can cause food poisoning. Most people get over food poisoning in a few days, but some people can become gravely ill.

There have been several outbreaks of food poisoning from raw sprouts. That is why the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is advising people not to eat raw sprouts if they wish to reduce the risk of food poisoning. This advice is most important for the elderly, children, and people who are already sick.

Do some research on the internet to find out why raw alfalfa sprouts can cause food poisoning. Try to find the answers to these questions and to questions you come up with on your own. What bacteria grow on alfalfa sprouts? Where do they come from? Are there ways to get rid of the bacteria? What are the symptoms of food poisoning? How should the symptoms be treated? What are the causes of food poisoning? How common is food poisoning? What steps can you take to prevent food poisoning from other foods, such as meat? Make a poster about food safety.

TRY THIS!

JOKE

Knock, knock. Who’s there?
Al.
Al who?
Al-fall-fa you because I think you’re so cute!