

# Alfalfa

Well known in today's health conscious sandwiches, alfalfa receives its illustrious name from the Arabic, al-fac-facah, "father of all foods. To the best of modern knowledge, the origin of alfalfa lies in present day Iran, but it's fame begun as animal fodder. Alfalfa is apparently the oldest crop grown solely for forage food and its actual use predates recorded history, the charred seeds having been found from around 10 000BCE. By the 1st century BCE however, it had spread to Greece and China by the Silk Road, and the rest as they say, is history.

Because of its importance among forage crops for animal fodder, alfalfa is similarly revered by farmers as the "Queen of Forages". We can learn a little about its use by reading agricultural and farming research. It seems Alfalfa can be used whenever animals need a high quality diet that increases: 'growth, stamina, strength and production of milk'. Not surprisingly, this list applies equally well to human beings, as Alfalfa is a veritable treasure trove of nutrients. Alfalfa is not only high in protein but it also contains vitamins A, B2, B3, B6, B12, C, E, D and the all important Vitamin K. In addition to this the minerals calcium, potassium, phosphorus, iron, and zinc are all found in significant doses. This is why Homeopaths and herbalists use alfalfa to treat anemia and debility in convalescence. It is considered a nutritive in western herbal medicine, or a blood building tonic in Chinese medicine. This is attested by Dr. Bradley of Ohio, who wrote in 1915: 'I find in Alfalfa, after about seven years' clinical tests in my practice and on myself, a superlative restorative tonic.... It rejuvenates the whole system by increasing the strength, vim, vigor, and vitality of the patient."

More specifically, Alfalfa is one of the best natural sources of vitamin K, the injection given to babies at birth. This is also the nutrient that helps blood to clot by moving calcium into proteins so that they can form a microscopic net to capture red blood cells. People using antibiotics such as amoxicillin, gentamicin, streptomycin and tetracycline can benefit from this, as it helps to restore the level of vitamin K which is depleted when using these antibiotics as well as cholesterol lowering drugs, steroids and anti-seizure medication. Vitamin K likewise helps bones to knit by working with vitamin D and glutamic acid to activate bone repair. The combination of these three nutrients is essential to building good bone in general, in fact your body can't actually use calcium without it.

Modern research is reported to show that alfalfa is useful as an agent in the fight against atherosclerosis and heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes and endometriosis. In addition to this, an article in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute reported that alfalfa helps to bind carcinogens in the colon to speed elimination. And finally, alfalfa is often found to be effective in eliminating bad breath, as it contains chlorophyll which alkalis the blood, normalizes digestion and gently stimulates elimination.

**WARNING:** The herbal extract or high doses of the plant are not to be taken during pregnancy and are also contraindicated when using blood thinning or anticoagulant medication such as warfarin, because Alfalfa seeds contain homostachydrine and stachydrine, which promote menstruation and may cause miscarriage. The herb should however not be regarded as an effective contraceptive, but is a valuable source of nutrition for breast feeding mothers.

In order to achieve the best results however, ALWAYS buy organic.

The Barefoot Doctor