

Alfalfa (*Medicago sativum*)

Common Names: Lucerne.

Location: Alfalfa is grown around the world, but it originated in the Middle East.

Description: Alfalfa is a flowering herb with spiraling seedpods.

Properties: This herb is prized for its content of calcium, magnesium, and potassium. The leaves of the alfalfa

plant also contain vitamins A, D, E and K as well as eight essential amino acids.

Uses: This herb is a blood purifier and detoxifies the body. It can be used to cure liver disorders, bleeding gums,

hemorrhoids, asthma, high blood pressure, infections, burns, constipation, anemia, athlete's foot, eczema, and

cancer. Alfalfa can also be taken to aid in the process of menopause.

Doses: Alfalfa may be ingested as a food or in pill form.

Warnings: Pregnant women and women suffering from premenstrual syndromes should not ingest alfalfa.

People with autoimmune disease and those taking anticoagulants should avoid taking alfalfa as well.

Alfalfa

**MEDICINAL:** Eliminates retained water, relieves urinary and bowel problems, helps in treating recuperation of narcotic and alcohol addiction. Used in treating anemia, fatigue, kidneys, peptic ulcers, pituitary problems, and for building general health.

**MAGICKAL:** Placed in a small jar and kept in a pantry or cabinet, it protects the home from poverty and hunger. Burn alfalfa and scatter the ashes around the property to protect it.

**GROWING:** Alfalfa is cultivated in many regions of the world. It is not picky as to soils, prefers full sun, and regular waterings, although it will tolerate dry spells. It is a perennial that grows to 1 to 3 feet tall, depending upon growing conditions.

## Alfalfa Leaf and Herb Profile

### Also known as

*Medicago sativa*, lucerne, holy-hay, and trefoil.

### Introduction

If you have ever driven across the desert west of the United States and noticed occasional fields of bright green grass, chances are you saw alfalfa. Alfalfa is one of the oldest cultivated plants. It has been used for centuries for hay, but it has also been used for centuries as a human food. Its name comes from the Arabic, *al-fac-facah*, "father of all foods."

## Constituents

As a food, alfalfa provides beta-carotene and vitamins C, E, and K (although it is not, as frequently claimed, a source of vitamin A).

## Parts Used

Seeds, sprouts, and the aboveground parts of the plant as a bulk herb, for teas, and in capsules.

## Typical Preparations

Alfalfa sprouts are found in groceries and salad bars. Capsules or tablets containing alfalfa leaves or seeds as well as the bulk powdered herb are found in health food stores. The usual dose of alfalfa for tea is 1 to 2 teaspoons per cup, steeped in boiling water for 10 to 20 minutes. Capsules and tablets of whole alfalfa should be taken according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

## Summary

If you answer no to the question "Got milk" you should answer yes to the question "Got alfalfa" Alfalfa is one of the best natural sources of vitamin K. This nutrient helps blood to clot by moving calcium into proteins that form a microscopic net to capture red blood cells. Vitamin K likewise helps bones to knit by working with vitamin D and glutamic acid to activate osteocalcin. The combination of these three nutrients is essential to building good bone. Your body can not use calcium without it. Alfalfa not only helps keep calcium in bones, it helps keep calcium out of the linings of arteries. You've probably heard of "hardening of the arteries" known in medical terms as atherosclerosis or arteriosclerosis. Hardened arteries are a result of calcium replacing cholesterol in the lining of the blood vessel. This calcification happens when a microscopically small amount of cholesterol becomes lodged in the arterial wall. White blood cells known as macrophages feed on cholesterol, and they make a surveillance run throughout the bloodstream to keep the arteries open. Sometimes, however, a macrophage gets imbedded in the arterial wall and can't get out. It dies trying to feed on the excess cholesterol, and other macrophages are signaled to clean up the new and larger problem in the lining of the blood vessel. There can eventually be a visible mass (sometimes the size of the period at the end of this sentence, but sometimes a lot larger) consisting of a tiny bit of cholesterol and a whole lot of dead white blood cells. The dead white blood cells can be replaced by artery-hardening calcium. Vitamin K from alfalfa, however, keeps that from happening. Just as vitamin K makes sure calcium moves into bones, the best information from current science is that it keeps calcium out of arterial clogs. Preventing arteriosclerosis isn't quite the same thing as lowering cholesterol. There is good preliminary evidence that alfalfa seeds can lower cholesterol levels in a condition called familial hypercholesterolemia. This form of high cholesterol does not usually respond to other medications. The levels of cholesterol after taking alfalfa for eight weeks aren't good, but they are 18 to 20% lower than the baseline and better than for statin drugs. In people who don't have familial hypercholesterolemia, there's no clear benefit for lowering cholesterol. Alfalfa is used with homeopathic remedy *Lactuca Virosa* to stimulate milk production in breastfeeding mothers. It can also be used with blessed thistle, fenugreek, and/or marshmallow for this purpose.

## Precautions

The biggest risk in using alfalfa is eating sprouts grown in contaminated water. This is also the simplest risk to avoid. Avoid limp or smelly sprouts, and rinse sprouts before use. Nutritional naysayers offer a long list of potential objections to using sprouts, most of them based on incomplete information. For most people, alfalfa sprouts are inherently safe, but they do interact with certain medications. If you're taking anti-rejection drugs for kidney transplant, don't use any form of alfalfa. The herbs and the medications you need to benefit from the transplant simply may not mix. There's no need to panic if you are a transplant patient and you've been using alfalfa products because the risk of adverse reaction is low. The reason not to use alfalfa is that while the risk of damage to the kidneys is very remote, it is also very serious. Similarly, you probably should treat alfalfa the same way you treat any other green, leafy vegetable if you take Coumadin. Alfalfa is rich in vitamin K that can interfere with the drug's anti-coagulant effects. If you are on Coumadin, you should have been advised on the safe consumption of not just alfalfa but also of all other green, leafy vegetables. For everyone else, the main concern about alfalfa is the chemical L-cavanine. It's found in alfalfa herb, alfalfa sprouts, and alfalfa seeds, and any product made from them without heating. L-cavanine, in extremely rare instances of excessive consumption, can cause abnormal red blood cell counts, enlargement of the spleen, or relapses of lupus. Recent epidemiological research has found that it does not cause lupus; in fact, in the most recent study, women with lupus were less likely to have eaten the herb than women who are free of the disease. How to avoid problems with L-cavanine? You can still use alfalfa, just used in teas or as a cooked vegetable, or in its raw form up to twelve 1-gram capsules or 3 tablespoons a day. Just don't overdo.

## Lucerne

**Botanical:** *Medicago sativa*

**Family:** N.O. Papilionaceae

---**Synonyms**---Purple Medicle. Cultivated Lucern.

---**Part Used**---Whole herb in flower.

---**Habitat**---Originally Medea, then old Spain, Italy, France; and cultivated in Persia and Peru.

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---**Description**---A deep-rooting perennial plant with numerous small clover-like spikes of blue or violet flowers of upright growth. Its herbage is green, succulent, and being an early crop is in a sense of some value as an agricultural plant. It yields two rather abundant green crops in the year - of a quality greatly relished by horses and cattle - it fattens them quickly and was much esteemed for increasing the milk of cows. One of the objections to growing it as a crop is the three to four years required before it attains full growth. When this plant is found in Britain growing wild it is merely an escape from cultivation. It may possibly have been a native of Europe; it is of great antiquity, having been imported into Greece from the East after Darius had discovered it in Medea, hence its name. It is referred to by Roman writers, and is cultivated in Persia and Peru, where it is mown all the year round. It first came into notice in 1757 in Britain. Its chief characteristics are: herb, 1 1/2 to 2 feet high; peduncled racemed; legumes contorted, twisted spirally, hairy; stem upright, smooth; leaves trifoliate; flowers in thick

spikes, corolla purple.

To increase weight, an infusion of 1 OZ. to the pint is given in cupful doses.

The root of Lucerne has sometimes been found as an adulterant of Belladonna root.