

Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*)  
Common Names: Greek hayseed, bird's foot.

Location: This herb can be found in the Mediterranean, China, India, Morocco and Turkey.

Description: The seeds of this herb are used medicinally.

Properties: Fenugreek can be used to help the liver and pancreas.

Uses: This herb can be used to enlarge breasts, treat diabetes, digestive tract disorders and mastitis.

Doses: Fenugreek can be found in seed form, teas and capsules.

Warnings: Do not take this herb if you are pregnant. If you wish to take this herb in combination with other medications or for the purpose of treating diabetes consult your doctor first.

## Fenugreek Seed and Powder Profile

### Also known as

*Trigonella foenum-graecum*, Alholva, Bird's Foot, Bockshornklee, Bockshornsame, Chandrika, Foenugraeci Semen, Foenugreek, Greek Clover, Greek Hay, Greek Hay Seed, Hu Lu Ba, Medhika, Methi, *Trigonella*.

### Introduction

The name fenugreek comes from the Latin term *Foenum-graecum*, or Greek hay, the plant being used to scent moldy hay. The genus name, *Trigonella*, is derived from another Greek name denoting "three-angled," from the shape of the "crown" around the seed. Ancient Roman medicine used fenugreek as an aid to male potency. Fenugreek is one of the base ingredients in curry powder and is used extensively in cooking throughout Asia. It is also used as a base for perfumes, soaps, and lotions. In Java, fenugreek is used as a hair tonic and to help cure baldness. It was first introduced into Chinese medicine in the Sung dynasty (circa 1057 C.E.) where it was used for treating kidney complaints, hernia, impotence, and other male related problems.

### Constituents

Arginine, beta-carotene, beta-sitosterol, coumarin, diosgenin, fiber, gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), kaempferol, luteolin, magnesium, manganese, niacin, potassium, pyridoxine, quercetin, riboflavin, rutin, sulfur, thiamine, trigonelline, tryptophan, vitexin, vitamin C, zinc.

### Parts Used

The fruit or "seeds," dried and used whole or ground.

### Typical Preparations

Used in cooking. Usually encapsulated for medicinal use, since the seeds are bitter. Up to 3-1/2 ounces

(100 g) of the seeds can be eaten in a single meal without gastrointestinal side effects, but greater amounts provide too much fiber for most people. Also taken as an extract.

## Summary

In the nineteenth century, Arab physicians would prepare a paste of fenugreek seeds soaked in water as a food for diabetics. Research in the 1990's found that adding an extract equivalent to 1-3 tablespoons of fenugreek seeds to the daily diet of diabetics significantly lowered blood sugars, HbA1C, triglycerides, and total cholesterol while raising HDL ("good") cholesterol?but most North Americans, Australians, and Europeans would find the bitter taste difficult. Encapsulated forms are most easily tolerated. Poultices of fenugreek seeds are a traditional remedy for furuncles, boils, and eczema. Currently, its major use in the US is in imitation maple syrups. The German E commission currently lists it as a way to stimulate the appetite.

## Precautions

If you wish to use fenugreek to lower blood sugars, it is better to use the powder rather than the whole seed. The powder releases more vanadium as it is digested. Avoid fenugreek if you are allergic to chickpeas, and Fenugreek should not be taken medicinally when pregnant, however moderate use in food should be fine.

**Botanical: *Foenum-graecum* (LINN.)**

**Family: N.O. Leguminosae**

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**---Synonyms---**Bird's Foot. Greek Hay-seed.

**---Part Used---**Seeds.

**---Habitat---**Indigenous to the countries on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. Cultivated in India, Africa, Egypt, Morocco, and occasionally in England.

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**---Description---**The name comes from *Foenum-graecum*, meaning Greek Hay, the plant being used to scent inferior hay. The name of the genus, *Trigonella*, is derived from the old Greek name, denoting 'three-angled,' from the form of its corolla. The seeds of Fenugreek have been used medicinally all through the ages and were held in high repute among the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans for medicinal and culinary purposes.

Fenugreek is an erect annual herb, growing about 2 feet high, similar in habit to Lucerne. The seeds are brownish, about 1/8 inch long, oblong, rhomboidal, with a deep furrow dividing them into two unequal lobes. They are contained, ten to twenty together, in long, narrow, sickle-like pods.

Taste, bitter and peculiar, not unlike lovage or celery. Odour, similar.

**---Constituents---**About 28 per cent mucilage; 5 per cent of a stronger-smelling, bitter fixed oil, which can be extracted by ether; 22 per cent proteids; a volatile oil; two alkaloids, Trigonelline and Choline, and a yellow colouring substance. The chemical composition resembles that of cod-liver oil, as it is rich in phosphates, lecithin and nucleoalbumin, containing also considerable quantities of iron in an organic form, which can be readily absorbed. Reutter has noted the presence of trimethylamine, neurin and betain; like the alkaloids in cod-liver oil, these substances stimulate the appetite by their action on the nervous system, or produce a diuretic or ureo-poietic effect.

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**---Medicinal Action and Uses---**In Cairo it is used under the name of *Helba*. This is an Egyptian preparation, made by soaking the seeds in water till they swell into a thick paste. Said to be equal to quinine in preventing fevers; is comforting to the stomach and has been utilized for diabetes. The seeds are soaked in water, then allowed to sprout, and when grown about 2 or 3 inches high, the green eaten raw with the seeds.

The seeds yield the whole of their odour and taste to alcohol and are employed in the preparation of emollient cataplasms, ointments and plasters.

They give a strong mucilage, which is emollient and a decoction of 1 OZ. seeds to 1 pint water is used internally in inflamed conditions of the stomach and intestines. Externally it is used as a poultice for abscesses, boils, carbuncles, etc. It can be employed as a substitute for cod-liver oil in scrofula, rickets, anaemia, debility following infectious diseases. For neurasthenia, gout and diabetes it can be combined with insulin. It possesses the advantage of being cheap and readily taken by children, if its bitter taste is disguised: 1 or 2 teaspoonful of the powder is taken daily in jam, etc.

The ground seeds are used also to give a maple-flavouring to confectionery and nearly all cattle like the flavour of Fenugreek in their forage. The powder is also employed as a spice in curry. At the present day, the ground seeds are utilized to an enormous extent in the manufactures of condition powders for horses and cattle; Funugreek is the principal ingredient in most of the quack nostrums which find so much favour among grooms and horsekeepers. It has a powerful odour of coumarin and is largely used for flavouring cattle foods and to make damaged hay palatable.

In India the fresh plant is employed as an esculent.

**---Other Species---**

*Trigonella purpurascens*, a British species, with small pinky-white flowers, one to three together, and straight, six- to eight-seeded pods, twice as long as the calyx.