

ALFALEFA

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Alfalfa

Alfalfa is mainly used as feed for horses and cattle. It is a high-quality hay crop grown widely in the United States and in temperate regions of South America and Asia. It can grow in many different climates and can tolerate a variety of soil conditions.

Planting

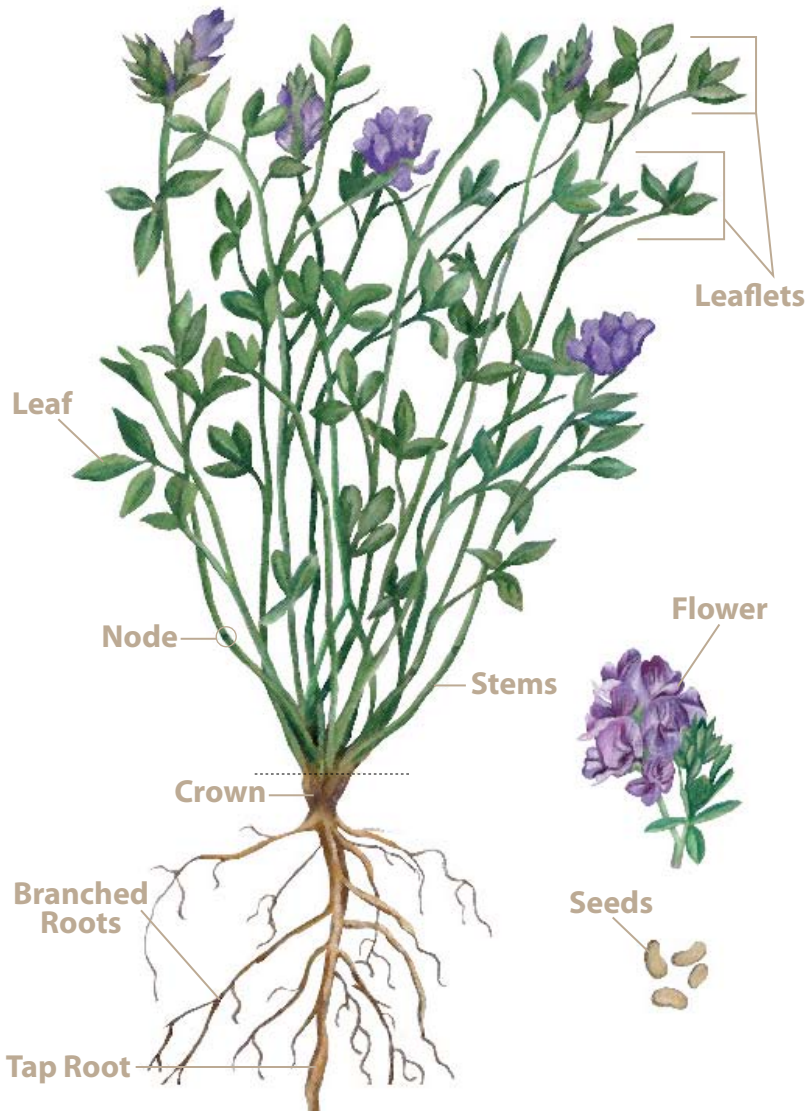
Alfalfa is usually planted in April or May using a machine called a drill. The drill places the seed into the ground about a half-inch deep. Each row is about four to five inches apart. Alfalfa is a perennial crop, which means it will grow in the same field four or five years in a row without replanting. Farmers like alfalfa because it is a legume plant which places nitrogen in the soil. The nitrogen is food for the soil and helps feed other plants such as corn that may be grown later in the same field.

Harvest

The alfalfa plant is harvested at least three times each summer. Harvest occurs in June, July and August. The alfalfa plant grows two to three feet tall and is cut before it produces its flowers. When alfalfa is harvested, a machine cuts each plant about four inches from the ground.

Uses

The alfalfa plant may be used as silage or wet feed for cattle. It is chopped into fine pieces and placed in a round building called a silo for storage. Another way to use alfalfa is to cut it like grass, leave it in the field to dry and then use a machine called a baler to make bales of hay for cattle, sheep and horses. People sometimes eat alfalfa, but it is alfalfa sprouts that are used in tossed salads.



On The Front

A. Alfalfa Plant

Alfalfa is a leafy plant, which grows two to three feet tall. More than 33 million acres of alfalfa are planted in the United States each year.

B. Alfalfa Branch

The alfalfa branch has purple flowers where the alfalfa seeds are located. These pods of seeds are twisted to form up to five spirals.

C. Alfalfa Seed

Alfalfa seeds are oval-shaped, very small and normally olive-green in color.