

Soybeans Seed

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The soybean or soya bean (*Glycine max*) is a species of legume native to Eastern Asia. Soybeans are an annual plant that may vary in growth, habit, and height. It may grow prostrate, not growing higher than 20 cm (7.8 inches), or even stiffly erect up to 2 meters (6.5 feet) in height. The pods, stems, and leaves are covered with fine brown or gray pubescence. The leaves are trifoliate (sometimes with 5 leaflets), and the leaflets are 6-15 cm (2-6 inches) long and 2-7 cm (1-3 inches) broad. The leaves fall before the seeds are mature. The small, inconspicuous, self-fertile flowers are borne in the axil of the leaf and are white, pink or purple. The fruit is a hairy pod that grows in clusters of 3-5, with each pod 3-8 cm (1-3 inches) long and usually containing 2-4 (rarely more) seeds 5-11 mm in diameter.

Despite its origins, 45 percent of the world's soybean area, and 55 percent of production, is in the United States. The U.S. produced 75 million metric tons of soybeans in 2000, of which more than one-third was exported. Other leading producers are Brazil, Argentina, China, and India.

Planting

Soybeans should be planted between April and August at approximately one inch beneath the soil's surface. The soil itself is not as important since soybeans are able to grow in a wide spectrum of soils; soybeans thrive in moist alluvial soils with a good organic content but will still grow elsewhere. The soybean will thrive in areas with hot summers, with optimum growing conditions of 20°C to 30°C as temperatures below or above this range will cause growth to be significantly retarded.

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Uses

As a food source, soybeans are high in protein, have a mild nutty flavor, and cook easily. Tofu, soy milk, soy flour, soy meal, soybean vegetable oil, and soy sauce, are among some of the more common food and cooking products created from the soybean. Due to the high protein content of the soybean and the ability to process it into a product with a texture and appearance similar to milk, it is regarded highly as a dairy substitute though does require calcium enrichment to match the nutritional value obtained from regular dairy products.

Soybeans are found in less digestible industrial products including oils, soap, resins, plastics, cosmetics, crayons, inks, clothing, biodiesel, solvents, and vodka. Soybeans have also been used in the production of the artificial silk Azlon and in the production of automotive plastics due to the research promoted by Henry Ford.

As a foraging wildlife food source, soybeans meet the needs of a wide array of animals including deer, doves, rabbit, duck, quail, and turkey. Deer in particular are highly fond of soybean crops and will quickly kill off small acreage plantings from grazing pressure. For smaller animals, the soybean growth will offer cover while the animals forage.