

Did You Know?



Sesame – *Sesamum indicum* L.

- Oriental sesame is another common name, as is benné and *Sesamum orientale* is a synonym.
- The plant that produces the sesame seed, is an annual broadleaf plant that grows 5-6' tall with bell shaped flowers that form at the leaf axil (where the stem and leaf meet).
- The plant is cultivated for its edible seeds which are also used to make an oil, as well as healing properties.
- Cultivated for thousands of years all over the world, including Africa, East Indies, China and India. It was cultivated for oil in 3000 BC.
- Brought to the United States by African slaves, who called them benné seeds, sesame was reportedly grown by Thomas Jefferson in test plots at Monticello.
- The seeds are used to top baked goods, milled into flour, crushed into a paste (tahini), pressed to produce oil, and used in sweet and savory dishes all over the world.
- The saying “Open Sesame!” from *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, likely comes from the fact that with the slightest touch, the sesame seed pods burst open and scatter the seeds.
- The writers of the children’s show *Sesame Street* selected the word “sesame” from the fabled command “Open Sesame!” in *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* to suggest excitement and adventure for the title of the show.
- Sesame seed colors include black, gray, red, and off-white to tan.
- Plant seeds when soil has warmed to approximately 80°F in areas that receive 90-150 frost-free days.
- Harvest as seeds ripen, dry and store out of direct light or in the freezer.
- Modern cultivars have seed pods that don’t open when ripe, enabling mechanical harvest.
- Sesame seeds are approximately 50% oil and 25% protein.
- The seeds were used by Egyptian physicians for medicine, Babylonian women to preserve youth and beauty and Roman soldiers’ strength and energy.
- iron, vitamin B1, and fiber.

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- Also sesamin and sesamolin, which belong to a special beneficial fiber group called lignans are found in the seeds. These are known to have cholesterol lowering effects, help to prevent high blood pressure and may even protect the liver from free radical damage.