



Plate from Flora von Deutschland Österreich und der Schweiz
 Courtesy of Robert W. Freckmann Herbarium UW-Stevens Point

Presented by the Town of Middleton



Photographer: Stephen L. Solheim

Alfalfa, first introduced to the U.S. in the 1730's, became more widely used in the 1850's. It is now harvested on about 23,000,000 acres in the U.S. In most growing regions, alfalfa is cut three to four times a year, though the crop is most successfully cured in those climates with limited summer rainfall. The forage is fed to livestock but humans also consume alfalfa, mainly in the form of sprouts and dietary supplements. Alfalfa may have future potential as a source of fiber, ethanol, protein, vitamins, and other products.

Alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*)

Alfalfa, a native of the Middle East, may be the oldest crop grown solely for animal forage. Its value as an animal feed was widely recognized very early in its history; it had spread from Greece to China more than 2,000 years ago. Alfalfa has been called the "Queen of Forages" because it is perennial, has high protein content, and is highly productive. Since it is a legume, it can take in or "fix" atmospheric nitrogen in root nodules, thereby enriching the soil for subsequent plantings in a crop rotation.

Narrative credit: James Coors, Professor UW-Madison