

Arachis hypogaea

[Synonyms : *Arachidna hypogaea*, *Arachis africana*, *Arachis americana*, *Arachis asiatica*, *Arachis hypogae*, *Arachis hypogaea* var. *communis*, *Arachis hypogaea* subsp. *fastigiata*, *Arachis hypogaea* var. *gigantea*, *Arachis hypogaea* var. *hirsuta*, *Arachis hypogaea* var. *macrocarpa*, *Arachis hypogaea* var. *microcarpa*, *Arachis hypogaea* var. *nambyquarae*, *Arachis hypogaea* subsp. *oleifera*, *Arachis hypogaea* var. *stenocarpa*, *Arachis hypogaea* forma *typica*, *Arachis hypogaea* var. *vulgaris*, *Arachis nambyquarae*, *Arachis rasteiro*]

PEANUT (English, Swedish) is an annual. Native to Brazil and Peru it has pea-like, reddish-streaked, yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Aardnoot* (Dutch), *Alcañüeses* (Spanish), *Amendoim* (Portuguese), *Amendoim verdadeiro* (Brazilian, Portuguese), *American groundnut*, *Apeneutjie* (Afrikaans), *Arachide* (French, Italian), *Arachis*, *Arahida* (Greek), *Arahidi* (Greek), *Arakhis* (Russian), *Arapico fistiki* (Greek), *Aráquida* (Portuguese), *Aráquido* (Spanish), *Avellana americana* (Spanish), *Bhui muga* (Marathi), *Bhu canaka* (Sanskrit), *Buchanaka* (Sanskrit), *Burák* (Czech), *Burský oříšek* (Czech), *Cacahuate* (Spanish), *Cacahué* (Spanish), *Cacahuète* (French), *Chang sheng* (Chinese), *Chiner badam* (Bengali), *Cini badama* (Hindi), *Đậu phộng* (Vietnamese), Earth almond, Earthnut, Earth pistacio, *Echte Erdnuss* (German), *Erdmandel* (German), *Erdnuss* (German), *Fa sung* (Chinese), *Fustaq* 'Abid (Arabic), Goober, Goober-pea, Grass nut, *Grandboontjie* (Afrikaans), *Grondnoot* (Dutch), Groundpea, Groundnut, Ground pistachio, Gub-a-gubs, *Hua sheng* (Chinese), *Jinguba* (Portuguese), *Jordnød* (Danish, Swedish), *Jordnødder* (Danish), *Jordnoedder* (Danish), *Jordnöt* (Swedish), *Kachang china* (Javanese, Malay), *Kachang tanah* (Malay), *Kadale kayi* (Kannada), *Luo hua sheng* (Chinese), *Maapähkel* (Estonian), *Maapähkinä* (Finnish), *Mancarra* (Portuguese), *Mandapi* (Sanskrit), *Mandorla di terra* (Italian), *Mani* (Cuban, South American, Spanish), *Mata kalai* (Bengali), *Mendoim* (Brazilian, Portuguese), *Mendubi* (Portuguese), *Mondubim* (Brazilian, Portuguese), *Monkey nut*, *Moong phali* (Hindi), *Mosambi cana* (Hindi), *Mudubim* (Brazilian, Portuguese), *Mugphalii* (Urdu), *Mungphali* (Hindi), *Mungphalii* (Nepalese), *Muongaphalii* (Hindi), *Mye pai* (Burmese), *Nelakada* (Malayalam), *Nella-kadalai* (Tamil), *Nellakkadalai* (Malayalam), *Nilakkatala* (Malayalam), *Njugu-Karanga* (Kikuyu), *Nkate* (Twi), *Nankinmame* (Japanese), *Orzacha podziemna* (Polish), *Orzech ziemny* (Polish), *Pender*, *Pig nut*, *Pinatsu* (Japanese), *Pinattsu* (Japanese), *Pindaplant* (Dutch), *Pinder*, *Pistache* (Creole), *Pistache de terre* (French), *Pistachier de terre* (French), *Podzemnica olejná* (Slovak), *Podzemnice olejná* (Czech), *Pois arachide* (French), *Rakkasei* (Japanese), *Rata-kaju* (Singhalese), *Sandaek dei* (Khmer), *Thùa lísong* (Thai), *Ttang kong* (Korean), *Tua lisong* (Thai), *Underground bean*, *Vaerkadalai* (Tamil), *Veeru senaga* (Telugu), *Verusenagalu* (Telugu), *Voandzeia*, and *Yerfistiği* (Turkish).

After flowering the stem bearing the ovary elongates and bends towards the ground, forcing the young pod beneath the soil where it ripens.

The nutritious seeds (nuts) are harvested in early Autumn and a tasteless edible oil (known as 'groundnut oil', 'peanut-' or 'arachide oil') is extracted (expressed) from them. (Most oil is consumed locally as cooking oil although Europe offers a major market for it.)

Warning – the nuts themselves are not poisonous but they can cause poisoning if they have

been infected by a fungus.

Hypogaea means ‘subterranean, underground or developing underground’.

Peanut remains have been found by archaeologists in ancient tombs in Peru and it is also depicted on Chimu pottery. (The Chimu civilization of north-western Peru was established in 1000 and conquered by the Incas in 1470.). Plant remains have also been found in excavations in Mexico dating back to the last centuries BC. First known written mention of the plant is ascribed to Oviedo y Valdes (1478-1557) the Spanish historian who lived in Haiti from 1513 to 1525, where he was Director of Mines for the Spanish. He reported that *mani* (a name still used in Cuba and South America) was widely grown and consumed by local American Indians.

In the middle of the 16th Century Portuguese traders introduced the plant to Africa where it flourished during the colonial era – and it was from there that slaves carried it back to the Americas, particularly to the Caribbean and to Virginia on the North American mainland. (This was yet another experimental crop to be found eventually on the Virginian estates of the 3rd President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826).) It is believed to have reached India not long after its introduction to western Africa and botanical historians suspect the plant made a pincer movement on eastern Asia in that it was introduced both from the West and from the East over the Pacific. (It would seem that there are few written records of the use of the plant among North American Indian tribes but information that does exist indicates that the Seminole Indians ate the plant and the Huron tribe are believed to have consumed the roots as emergency rations.)

Then in 1840 it was suggested by a French colonist of Cape Verde (off the west African coast), a Monsieur Jaubert, that the peanut should be imported into Marseilles for the seed oil. Apparently French spinners were having difficulties in getting sufficient supplies of olive oil at that time and peanut’s seed oil was viewed as a viable alternative. Initially the seeds were obtained from western Africa but once the Suez Canal had been opened in 1869 more sources of supply were accessible, not least from India. This led eventually to today’s European market for groundnut oil (*Olea europaea*) used particularly for both culinary purposes and making soap.

It was the American, John Harvey Kellogg (1852-1943) who, before joining his brother in the venture that led to the formation of the commercial food giant W K Kellogg Company in 1906, developed the first peanut butter. In the 1870s (with some other foods) he devised this butter for his patients while he was physician in charge at the Western Health Reform Institute. Roughly a quarter of a century later another American, George Washington Carver (c.1860-1943) a celebrated botanist and scientist, was discovering an alleged 300 uses for peanuts – and was encouraging its growth (and that of sweet potatoes, *Ipomoea batatas*) particularly among poor black farmers in the depleted soil left from the old cotton plantations in the Deep South. As at the European ‘Lupin banquet’ (*Lupinus albus*) in Hamburg in 1917, peanut was the basis of a promotional meal given by George Carver to some Alabama businessmen. The menu included peanut soup, peanut ‘chicken’ served with peanut prepared as a vegetable and accompanied by peanut bread (made with peanut flour), followed by a salad with groundnut oil dressing. Then the pudding was peanut ice cream, complemented with peanut cookies – and finally coffee (made from ground peanuts) accompanied by peanut candy.

During World Wars I and II demand for the seed oil was greatly increased and experience of this may well have been a contributory factor in the disastrous British decision to cultivate peanuts in Africa on a grand scale. The infamous ‘Groundnut Scheme’ is still remembered in Britain today. In 1946 the then British Government began a project for oil production in East Africa without giving adequate prior consideration to the ramifications of such an exercise. It involved planting peanuts there over an area of about 3 million

acres. Over 100 million dollars were sunk in this Scheme but by 1951 (five years later) only 65,000 of the projected 3 million acres had been established. (Even this had actually been an achievement in the face of unreliable rainfall, the need for extensive land clearance, and disease.) It is hardly surprising that the Project had to be abandoned in a fog of scandal.

Today in South America (peanut's native habitat) and China, India and Africa the nuts continue to be harvested as an important world food crop. In Java (now an Indonesian island) stem tips and young pods are boiled or roasted and eaten like a leaf vegetable, the seed cake left from oil pressings has been eaten in the past with rice (*Oryza*), and fried fermented seed paste has also provided a food. Malaysians eat the seeds not only with curries but also roasted and sugarcoated. The seed oil has been used to make a milk substitute. In North America and Europe peanut butter is a favourite spread (especially with children) and in the recent past in Europe the seeds have also offered a coffee substitute.

The plant is grown as a forage crop too, and the foliage has been used as fodder and hay.

Peanut, with sugar cane (*Saccharum officinarum*), tangerines (*Citrus reticulata*) and yam bean (*Pachyrhizus erosus*), plays a significant role in the Mexican Festival of the Dead which takes place annually on 1st November.

A very young saying, said to have started only in 1966

If you pay peanuts, you get monkeys.

means you get what you pay for.

The oil is used today by the food industry (for canning, and the manufacture of margarine, peanut butter and salad oil) and in pharmaceutical preparations. Peanut flour is often an ingredient in commercially prepared diabetic foods. The toiletry industry uses the oil in the manufacture of soap, creams and bath oils. It is also used in the manufacture of plastics and lubricants. Oilcake provides animal feed, while the shells are used in insulation materials.

Medicinally, in India the unripe nuts have been taken by nursing mothers to increase the flow of milk.. The oil has been used internally in remedies for some venereal diseases and it has been applied externally in treatments for rheumatism.