

Brassica napus

[Synonyms : *Brassica campestris* var. *napus*, *Brassica carinata* var. *saharensis*, *Brassica napobrassica*, *Brassica oleracea* var. *napobrassica*, *Brassica oleracea* var. *viridis*]

RAPE is an annual or biennial. Found in Asia (particularly India) and Europe, it has small yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Bresych yr Ýd* (Welsh), Canola, Carcel oil plant, *Cavolo rapone* (Italian), Cole, Cole seed, *Colza* (French), *Kålrot* (Swedish), *Lanttu* (Finnish), *Nabo* (Spanish), Navews, *Navone* (Italian), *Rabette* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Rape cabbage, Rape seed, *Raps* (German), *Saljam* (Persian), *Suidiches* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Swede rape, *Toriva* (Hindi), Turnip, and Winter rape.

The flowers are pollinated by bees.

The seeds are pressed to yield oil.

Warning – rape, untreated, can be poisonous for some animals (apparently sheep are little affected by the plant).

Napus is Latin (kind of turnip) meaning ‘turnip-like’.

The common name Rape is believed to be derived from the Latin word for ‘turnip’ *rapum*.

The plant has many varieties and hybrids some of which provide a standing forage crop for sheep and cattle, while others, when processed as necessary to remove poisons, are also made into animal feed.

Rape used to be added to salads as a flavouring, and its leaves have also been cooked as a vegetable (not least by the North American Cherokee Indians).

Some of the North America Indian tribes have used rape medicinally. The Micmac tribe used it for treating coughs and colds, and the Cherokee prescribed it for croup and asthma. The latter also used it to enhance appetite and ease fluid retention. Internally the Micmac also used it for smallpox, and externally the Iroquois applied leaf poultices to boils and sores.

Rapeseed oil (known in North America as ‘canola’) has only achieved worldwide use as an edible oil since 1975. Until that time the seeds of this species, or varieties of it (and the oil extracted) were inedible as they have a high content of a poisonous acid. Initially the oil was used only as a lubricant, especially for ships and steam-powered trains where it was especially valued as it could cling to metal surfaces that were subjected to water or steam. However by 1975 new varieties of rape had been developed in which the poisonous content was either banished or reduced to extremely low concentrations – and this enabled its edible usage as well. Some authorities note that in Canada at least demand for rapeseed oil (or canola) increased by 130% in the late 1980s. (Apparently the food industry was choosing rapeseed oil in preference to the vegetable oils such as soya (*Glycine max*) which had been dominating the market.)

Today the plant provides forage and commercially processed animal feed, and the oil is used by the food industry eg. for oiling bread before baking.