

Carthamus tinctorius

[Synonyms : *Carthamus glaber*, *Carthamus inermis*, *Carthamus tinctoria*]

SAFFLOWER is an annual. Possibly native to the eastern Mediterranean it has thistle-like, orange-yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Açafrão* (Portuguese), *Açafrão-bastardo* (Portuguese), African saffron, *Alazor* (Spanish), *Alazor bastardo* (Spanish), American saffron, *Asfoor* (Arabic), *Asfour* (Arabic), *Asfur* (Arabic), *Asfur* (Arabic), *Aspur* (Turkish), *Azafrán* (Czech), *Azafrán bastardo* (Spanish), *Barvilni rumenik* (Slovenian), *Barvilni žafran* (Slovenian), Bastard saffron, *Bastard Safran* (German), *Bazr-el-ahris* (Arabic), *Beni bana* (Japanese), *Bojadisarski bodalj* (Croatian), *Cartamo* (Italian), *Cártamo* (Portuguese, Spanish), *Cártamo alazor* (Spanish), *Cartamo officinale* (Italian), *Carthame* (French), *Carthame des teinturiers* (French), Carthamine, *Cây rum* (Vietnamese), *Croco bastardo* (Italian), *Da hong hua* (Chinese), Distaff thistle, Dyer's saffron, Fake saffron, *Falscher Safran* (German), False saffron, *Falso-açafrão* (Portuguese), *Falso zafferano* (Italian), *Färberdistel* (German), *Färbersaflor* (German), *Färgtistel* (Swedish), *Farvetidsel* (Danish), *Faux-safran* (French), *Fleur de carthame* (French), *Flor de cártamo* (Portuguese), *Ghosfor* (Maltese), *Graine de carthame* (French), *Grogo* (Italian), *Gulrang* (Persian), *Hoang-chi* (Chinese), *Hồng hoa* (Vietnamese), *Hong hwa* (Korean), *Kagireh* (Indian), *Kamalottara* (Sanskrit), *Kam foi* (Thai), *Kartam* (Turkish), *Kartamo tinktura* (Esperanto), *Kasumba* (Hindi, Javanese), *Kasumbah* (Hindi), Kasum of India, *Kâzirah* (Persian), *Kesumba* (Malay), *Khasaka dânah* (Persian), *Knikos* (Greek), Kurdi of India, *Kushumba* (Telugu), *Kusum* (Bengali, Hindi), *Kusumba* (Tamil), *Magyar pirostó* (Hungarian), Orange carthamus, Parrot plant, Parrot seed, *Pórsáfrány* (Hungarian), *Požlt farbiarska* (Slovakian), Rouge plant, *Saffloer-bloem* (Danish), Safflor (Danish, English, Swedish), Saffron thistle, *Saflor* (German, Russian), *Saflori* (Finnish), *Saflor krasil'nyi* (Russian), *Safran bâtard* (French), *Šafranika* (Croatian), *Safran yalanci* (Turkish), *Sáfrányos szeklice* (Hungarian), *Semente de cártamo* (Portuguese), *Semilla de cártamo* (Spanish), *Sendura-kam* (Tamil), *Suf* (Ethiopian), *Světlice barviřská* (Czech), *Szaflór* (Hungarian), *Szeklice* (Hungarian), *Usfar* (Arabic), *Vārisaflori* (Finnish), *Yalanci safran* (Turkish), *Yalan safran* (Turkish), *Zafferano bastardo* (Italian), *Zafferano falso* (Italian), *Žafranika* (Slovenian), and *Zurtum* (Arabic).

An edible, oil (low cholesterol) is extracted from the seeds that, unlike linseed oil (*Linum usitatissimum*), does not yellow with age.

Despite the fact that the flower petals have similar uses, saffron (*Crocus sativus*) is not related to safflower.

Tinctorius is derived from Latin *tinctus* (dyed, stained, tinged) meaning 'used in dyeing'.

Safflower has been cultivated for thousands of years. Fruit remains dating back to at least 1500 BC have been found by archaeologists in Egyptian tombs. In that of Tut'ankhamun (the boy-king who died aged about 18 in c.1340 BC) whole seeds were found which are believed were for medicinal use on his journey, and safflower was also used for the red dye on linen. Authorities note that safflower has long been cultivated in India as well, where it acquired several Sanskrit names. Some believe it had reached China by the 4th

Century, and at about the same time was introduced to Java (now an Indonesian island) by Hindu immigrants.

The plant yields both a yellow and a red dye, but today these have virtually been superseded by synthetic aniline dyes. The red dye has been used on silk to obtain shades of rose and scarlet, and also as a cosmetic ingredient it is mixed with talc in rouge.

The seed oil (when extracted with heat) has been used in India as a fuel. It is also used in paints and varnishes, and in preserving leather. Indians have used it for cooking (like sunflower oil, *Helianthus annuus*) and as an adulterant for *ghi*, when it is extracted cold as it does not then darken in colour.

In Europe, even at the beginning of the 20th Century, the seeds were used as an alternative to rennet for making cheese. Safflower provides a colouring for food, particularly butter and liqueurs, and also for candles. Spain is especially associated with safflower which is the colouring agent for different types of traditional soups. The young shoots can also be eaten.

It is thought that it may have been the Mormons who introduced safflower to the North American Hopi Indians of Arizona in about 1870. Records dating back fifty years show that even relatively recently the Hopi were using safflower flowers to colour their wafer bread yellow.

The seeds are fed to poultry, and pressed seed cake is said to make good cattle fodder.

In the early 20th Century safflower was employed in the treatment of anyone thought to be possessed by the devil.

The food industry used safflower commercially today in manufacturing some margarines, and in cooking and salad oils (not least for its anti-cholesterol qualities). It is used by the cosmetics industry in rouge and by the toiletry industry in soap. The oil is used to make paints, varnish and linoleum – and it can also be found in commercial livestock feeds.

Medicinally, safflower was used as a remedy for children's illnesses, such as measles, and for jaundice, muscular rheumatism, fevers and skin eruptions. Today in China it is still used for treating wounds and some period problems, as well as for coronary disease, skin ulcers and thrombotic ailments.