

Eleusine coracana

[Synonyms : *Cynosurus coracanus*, *Cynosurus cristatus*, *Eleusine cerealis*, *Eleusine coracana* var. *alba*, *Eleusine coracana* var. *atra*, *Eleusine coracana* var. *fusca*, *Eleusine coracana* var. *stricta*, *Eleusine coracana* var. *tocussa*, *Eleusine indica* var. *coracana*, *Eleusine indica* var. *stricta*, *Eleusine luco*, *Eleusine pilosa*, *Eleusine sphaerosperma*, *Eleusine stricta*, *Eleusine tocussa*]

FINGER MILLET is a hybrid annual grass. From tropical eastern Africa it has minute, reddish-brown to nearly white or black seeds (grain).

It is also known as African millet, Birdsfoot millet, *Bishnah* (Arabic), Coracan (English, French, Italian, Portuguese), *Coracán* (Spanish), Coracana millet, *Dagussa* (Italian), Dragon's claw millet, *Eleusina* (Italian), *Éleusine* (French), *Elevzina karakana* (Russian), *Fingerhirse* (German), *Hirse* (German), *Kanab* (Arabic), *Karakkan* (Indian, Singhalese, Sri Lankan, Tamil), *Kê chânvít* (Vietnamese), *Kelvaragu* (Tamil), *Kelvaregu* (Tamil), *Kodo* (Nepalese), *Kolvaaraagu* (Tamil), Koracan, Korakan (Dutch, English, German), *Krummährlige Eleusine* (German), *Kurakan* (German), *Kurakkan* (Singhalese), *Mandal* (Punjabi), *Mandua* (Hindi), *Maruá* (Bengali), *Mijo coracano* (Spanish), *Nachni* (Bengali), *Nangli* (Urdu), *Raagi* (Tamil), Ragee corn, Ragee millet, *Raggî* (Arabic), Ragi (English, Hindi, Sanskrit, Spanish), *Ragi darisi* (Turkish), *Ragigierst* (Dutch), *Ragulu* (Telugu), *Shikoku bie* (Japanese), *Sormihirssi* (Finnish), and *Upoko* (Zulu).

In Africa finger millet is used (as it has been there for centuries) to make a gritty porridge eaten with other foods. Finger millet was being cultivated in Ethiopia in the 3rd millennium BC and is believed to have been introduced to India in about 1000 BC. It eventually became, as it still is today, the prime millet eaten in those regions. Apparently authorities suspect that the grain reached Europe at about the time of the birth of Christianity. Today finger millet is cultivated as an important food crop for home use not only in Africa but also in various parts of Asia especially China and southern India.

It is the source of ragi flour which is used for making cakes and puddings and the grain is also fermented to produce a light beer (especially in parts of India and the Himalayas) as well as other alcoholic drinks. Dieticians have noted that ragi cannot only provide a nourishing food for infants and invalids but also for diabetics.

The grain has one particularly valuable property. The seeds store well and can be viable for more than 10 years without weevil damage or significant deterioration in quality. This makes finger millet an important asset in the view of many authorities in times of famine.

Ripe grain is also fed to livestock – and the straw can be grazed as well.

Medicinally the Hill tribes of northern Thailand use the grain to prevent abortion or miscarriage. It has also been used in African or Asian remedies for treating smallpox, measles, pleurisy, pneumonia, liver disease and leprosy.