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Lathyrus sativus

[Synonyms : *Lathyrus asiaticus*, *Lathyrus azureus*]

INDIAN PEA is an annual climber. Native to western Asia it has small, sometimes blotched and winged, blue or red, white flowers.

It is also known as Blue vetchling, *Chícaros* (Portuguese), Chick pea, Chickling pea, Chickling vetch, *Cicarda* (Maltese), Dogtooth pea, Everlasting pea, *Gesse commune* (French), Grass pea, Grass peavine, *Guijas* (Spanish), Heath pea, *Hrachor* (Slovak), *Hrachor setý* (Czech), *Hurtuman* (Arabic), *Khesari* (Bengali, Hindi), Khessary pea, *Kisari* (Punjabi), *Lakh* (Marathi), Lath, Lathyrus, *Latiro kultiva* (Esperanto), Mutter pea, *Platterbse* (German), *Plattvial* (Swedish), *Pois carré* (French), Riga pea, *Saatplatterbse* (German), *Sandika* (Sanskrit), and Vetchling, White pea, Wood pea, and Wood vetch.

Warning – Indian pea is poisonous in large quantities for both animals and humans and can lead to temporary or permanent paralysis of the body and limbs. It can also cause lathyrism eg. paralysis of the larynx, excitability, convulsions and ultimately death.

Sativus means ‘cultivated’.

The seeds are used in a balanced diet in animal feed and also for human consumption.

Lathyrism can be caused by excessive consumption of Indian pea and today would normally occur only in times of famine. It has been a notable disease in the past (particularly in India) and has been identified in Hindu literature. The term ‘lathyrism’ only came into being in 1873 but records indicate that the illness was not unknown in Europe centuries ago. Authorities have noted that it was even referred to by the ‘father of medicine’ in the West, the Greek physician Hippocrates (c. 460-377 or 359 BC). In more recent times an outbreak of lathyrism was recorded in Spain in 1940-1941 during the Second World War and even today pockets of it are occasionally reported in India.