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Plantago afra

[Synonyms : *Plantago psyllium*, *Psyllium afra*]

PSYLLIUM is an annual. Native from the Mediterranean to India (particularly North Africa, France and Spain) it has tiny brownish-white flowers with many long stamens.

It is also known as Black psyllium, *Chmelík blešníkovaný* (Czech), Flea seed, Fleawort, *Flohkraut* (German), Glandular plantain, *Jitrocel blešníkovaný* (Czech), *Loppfrö* (Swedish), Plantain seed, Psyllion, Psyllios, Psyllium plantain, Pysllium seeds, *Strauchwegerich* (German), *Wegerich* (German), and *Zerrighet il-brighet* (Maltese).

Gum is extracted from the ripe seeds.

Afra means ‘of or from Africa (often North African coast)’.

Many of the common names reflect the alleged similarity of the seed’s appearance to a flea (the Greek word for ‘flea’ is *psylla*).

The gum is not only used to dress muslin but it is also an ingredient used by the cosmetics industry in face-masks and in some proprietary pharmaceutical preparations as well.

Medicinally, the seeds of this species are considered to be superior to those of other closely related species. While they have similar uses to those of greater plantain (*Plantago major*) they are particularly chosen for treating fluid retention and constipation.