

Zea mays

[Synonyms : *Mays americana*, *Mays zea*, *Mayzea cerealis*, *Mayzea cerealis* var. *gigantia*, *Stigmata maydis*, *Zea americana*, *Zea arnylacea*, *Zea cania*, *Zea curagua*, *Zea erythrolepis*, *Zea hirta*, *Zea mais* var. *hirta*, *Zea maize*, *Zea mays* var. *amylacea*, *Zea mays* var. *pennsylvanica*, *Zea mays* var. *precox*, *Zea mays* var. *saccharata*, *Zea mays* var. *virginica*, *Zea saccharata*, *Zea segetalis*, *Zea vulgaris*]

MAIZE is an annual hybrid grass. Of uncertain origin in South America it has light green (or soft yellowish, purplish-red, or light brown) tassels (or ‘beards’ or ‘corn silk’) and plume-shaped heads of flowers.

It is also known as *Aburow* (Twi), *Bhuth tha Mokka* (Indian), *Bhutta* (Bengali), *Blé de Turquie* (French), *Blé turc* (French), *Bllai d'Espogne* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Cholam* (Malayalam), *Chuwe* (Zuni North American Indian), Corn, Cornmeal, *Durak shami* (Arabic), *Echter Mais* (German), *Formentone* (Italian), Grain maize, *Grano di Turchia* (Italian), *Gran-Turco* (Italian), Hominy, Indian corn, Indian wheat, *Jagong* (Malay, Sundanese), *Jagung* (Javanese), *Kao pot* (Thai), *Kho-shahe-makki* (Persian), *Körnermais* (German), *Kukurica siata* (Slovak), *Kukuřice setá* (Czech), *Mais* (French, German, Italian, Spanish), *Maissi* (Finnish), *Maíz* (Spanish), *Maíz comun* (Spanish), *Maizo* (Esperanto), *Majs* (Swedish), *Makai* (Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi), *Makka* (Indian), *Makka-cholam* (Tamil), *Mayi* (Creole), *Mbembe* (Kikuyu), Mealies (South African), *Mijo turquesco* (Spanish), *Misir bugdayi* (Turkish), *Mokkajanna* (Telugu), *Nikiis* (Pawnee North American Indian), Oswego arrowroot, *Porumb* (Rumanian), *Qamh ir-rum* (Maltese), *Soh mai* (Chinese), *Tuerkisher Weizen* (German), *Turkisches korn* (German), *Wahaba* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), *Wamnaheza* (Dakota North American Indian), *Yavanala* (Sanskrit), and *Yu mai* (Chinese); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of agreement (corn straw), plenty, quarrel (broken corn), and riches. There are hundreds of varieties which can have yellow, black, blue, red, white or multi-coloured ears.

The fresh ripe cobs, the older ripe seeds and the silky tassels (or ‘beards’ or ‘corn silk’) are used. The cobs are harvested immediately upon maturity. If unharvested the seeds become hard and starchy, and if stored they lose flavour and toughen.

Warning – leaves and stalks can be poisonous (the poison increasing to flowering and decreasing rapidly thereafter) for livestock. The pollen can cause hay fever.

Mays is a corruption of Cuban and Haitian *mahiz* (maize) meaning ‘our mother’

In North America Maize is often referred to as ‘corn’ (although this name can mean oats (*Avena sativa*) in Scotland, and wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) or sweetcorn (*Zea mays saccharata*) in England).

This paragraph gives a rough idea of the wide range of manufactured products in which maize is involved today. The food industry uses varieties of the cereal for the grain, for the cornflour (cornstarch), cornmeal, cooking oil (corn oil) and in a glucose syrup (corn syrup). These in turn are used in other food products such as cornflakes, salad dressings, echiladas, tamales, tortillas, corn chips, semolina, pancakes, soups, sauces and confectionery eg. liquorice sweets. The agricultural industry uses cornmeal as animal and poultry feed, and the drinks industry uses the grain and corn syrup, particularly in soft

drinks, in corn whisky, Bourbon whiskey and some beers (including *chicha* in South America). It is also used by the toiletry industry in toothpaste and by the cosmetics industry eg. in face powder, as well as by the pharmaceutical industry (which uses green corn silk in particular). Maize starch is used in size for preparing paper and cloth (and also in laundry starch for the latter), as well as in printing inks for both. It is also used in making adhesives. Maize is used too for making shoe polishes, paint, plastics, explosives and synthetic rubber production.

Maize provides the main ingredient for a Jamaican delicacy or confection known as *Brown George*. Basically this is made by mixing dried ground maize with sugar and salt.