

# The East London Garden Society

## Plant Facts

### Hemp (Marijuana)



Hemp is a commonly used term for high growing varieties of the Cannabis plant and its products which include fibre, oil, and seed. Hemp is refined into products such as hemp seed foods, hemp oil, wax, resin, rope, cloth, pulp, paper and fuel.

Other variants of the herb *Cannabis Sativa* are widely used as a drug, commonly known as marijuana; these variants are typically low growing and have higher content of tetrahydrocannabinol. The legality of Cannabis varies widely from country to country. In many countries' regulatory limits for concentrations of psychoactive drug compounds, particularly THC in hemp require the use of strains of the plant which are bred for low content.

Hemp is one of the earliest domesticated plants known; it has been cultivated by many civilizations for over 12,000 years. Hemp use dates back to the Neolithic Age in China with hemp fibre imprints found on Yangshao culture pottery dating from the 5th millennium BC. The Chinese later used hemp to make clothes, shoes, ropes, and an early form of paper. The classical Greek historian Herodotus (ca. 480 BC) reported that the inhabitants of Scythia would often inhale the vapours of hemp-seed smoke, both as a ritual and for their own

pleasurable recreation. In late medieval Germany hemp was employed in cooked dishes as filling in pies and tortes or boiled in a soup.

George Washington pushed for the growth of hemp and even grew hemp himself, as it was a cash crop commonly used to make rope and fabric. In May 1765 he noted in his diary about the sowing of seeds each day until mid-April, recounting the harvest in October was 27 bushels. In 1937 the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 was passed in the United States, but it was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in a unanimous verdict. Ultimately it became superseded by the Controlled Substances Act of 1970.

Hemp had been grown for millennia in Asia and the Middle East for its fibre, but commercial production of hemp took off in the eighteenth century because of colonial and naval expansion of the era and economies needed large quantities of hemp for rope and oakum. In Western Europe the cultivation of hemp was not legally banned by the 1930s.

Hemp is used for many varieties of products for cordage of varying tensile strength, durable clothing as well as nutritional products for cooking and in plastics. Hemp seeds have been used in bird seed mix as well. A survey in 2003 showed that more than 95% of hemp seed sold in the EU was used in animal and bird feed. Hemp seed is also used as fishing bait.

Hemp is used for industrial purposes including paper, textiles, clothing, biodegradable plastics, construction, body products, health food and biofuel. Hemp seeds can be eaten raw, ground into a meal, sprouted, made into hemp milk, prepared as tea and used in baking, plus the fresh leaves work well in a salad. Products include cereals, frozen waffles, hemp milk ice cream, hemp tofu, and nut butters, hemp flour, hemp cake and hemp protein powder.

Recently it has been found useful in cancer treatments, together with other known, terminal conditions. In effect Hemp (Marijuana) is a much-maligned plant which has been made illegal in modern times despite it being a beneficial plant for humankind.