

Historical Journey with Amaranth

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Abstract

Amaranth is the common name for more than 60 different species of Amaranthus, which are usually 5–7 feet tall with broad green leaves and impressively bright purple, red, or golden flowers. It is said to be native of India and is most common summer leafy vegetable in the plains of Indian sub–continents. Three species Amaranthus cruenus, A. hypochondriacus, and A. caudatus are commonly grown for their edible seeds, while the A. tricolor L. and A. bilitum L. both are herbaceous annual grown for leaf purposes. Amaranth is a versatile warm–season, broad leaf plant that can be grown as a grain, ornamental, leafy vegetable, or forage crop. The seeds are high in lysine, fiber, and protein; low in saturated fats; and gluten–free. Amaranth can be ground into flour, popped like popcorn, or flaked like oatmeal. Because many of amaranth's uses are similar to that of cereal grasses, amaranth is often referred to as a pseudo–cereal. Products containing amaranth include breakfast cereals, granola, crackers, breads, cookies, and other flour–based products. The name for amaranth comes from the Greek amarantos, “one that does not wither,” or “the never–fading” true to form. Amaranth's bushy flowers retain their vibrancy even after harvesting and drying, and some varieties of ornamental amaranth forego the production of fancy flowers in favor of flashy foliage, sprouting leaves that can range from deep blood–red to light green shoot with purple veining. It isn't a true cereal grain in the sense that oats, wheat, sorghum, and most other grains are. “True cereals” all stem from the Poaceae family of plants, while amaranth (among others) is often referred to as a pseudo–cereal, meaning it belongs to a different plant species.