PLANT FACT SHEET

Vicia faba L.

GENUS *Vicia* **FAMILY** Fabaceae

COMMON NAMES Broad bean, Faba bean

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Seeds, Leaves, Pods, Vegetable, Flowers

It is mostly the young beans that are eaten.
The ripe beans and leaves are also edible. The leaves are used for sarma in Turkey. They are rolled around a filling of rice or minced meat.
The dried beans can be boiled, ground into flour and added to soups or used for making tofu. Sprouted seeds are cooked and eaten.
The tender pods are eaten as a vegetable.
CAUTION: Some people, mainly of Mediterranean origin can get a disease called Favism from these beans. The beans should be well cooked. Also they can react with some people using some antidepressant drugs.

DESCRIPTION

An upright plant up to 1 m tall. Plants vary in height from 30 cm to 180 cm. It has a well developed taproot. It has square stems which are hollow. They have wings at the angles. There can be 1-7 branches from near the base of the plant. The leaves have leaflets along the leaf stalk and ending in a short point. There are 2-6 leaflets. These are 5-10 cm long. Flowers occur in the axils of leaves and there are 1-6 flowers on a stalk. The flowers are white with black spots. Pods are large and fat and contain several large beans inside. The pods are 5-10 cm long in field varieties and can be 30 cm long in garden varieties. They are fleshy with a white velvety lining. They become tough and hard at maturity. The seeds can vary a lot in shape and size. They can be flat or rounded and white, green, brown, purple or black. They are 1-2.6 cm long. The hilum along the seeds is prominent.

HABITAT

A temperate plant. It is only suitable for the highlands over about 1200 m. in the tropics. It mainly occurs between 1900 and 2700 m altitude in equatorial zones. It is frost tolerant. It is resistant to drought. It can grow with temperatures down to 4°C. In the lowland hot tropics it often flowers but does not set seed. It requires fertile soils. It does best with adequate lime. It needs a pH of 6.4-7.2. It can tolerate some salinity. In Nepal they grow to 1800 m altitude. It suits hardiness zones 8-10. In Yunnan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

The crop is grown from seed. Seeds are sown at 15 to 40 cm spacing. If the seed pod formation is poor, it can be improved by pinching out the tops of the plants when in flower. Hand pollination also helps. Plants are self pollinated but also cross pollinated by insects.

Harvesting and Seed Production

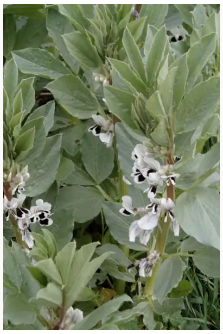
Time to maturity is 12-16 weeks. Yields in the cool tropics vary between 1 and 2 tons per hectare.

NOTES

There are about 140 Vicia species. They are mostly temperate.

PICTURES

Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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