

Data Sheet: Grass (not on lunch tray)

In many countries around the world, a type of grass called alfalfa hay is an important crop for animal production. It is used for feeding livestock, like cows, as well as ground covering to protect the soil.

Alfalfa plants look like its distant cousin clover. During the flowering season it produces a small cluster of purple flowers that eventually produce 10–20 seeds.

Alfalfa plants grow year round and usually live 4 to 8 years, but can live more than 20 years, depending on the variety and climate. The plant grows to a height of up to 1 meter (3.3 feet), and has a deep root system.

Alfalfa is widely grown throughout the world as food for cattle, and is most often harvested as hay. Alfalfa has the highest feeding value of all hay crops. When grown on soils where it is well adapted, alfalfa is often the highest-yielding plant for grazing.

Why is grass *not* on the food tray?

Grass

Nutrition Facts	
Serving size	
Calories	
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat	
Saturated Fat	
Trans Fat	
Cholesterol	
Sodium	
Total Carbohydrates	
Dietary Fiber	
Total Sugars	
Protein	
Vitamin D	
Calcium	
Iron	
Potassium	
*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a human's daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	

Humans can eat alfalfa sprouts, but once full-grown there is virtually no nutritional value for humans. Our digestive systems cannot absorb the nutrients in these plants. Other animals like cattle, horses, sheep, and goats have a digestive system that can absorb the nutrients from alfalfa plants.

Alfalfa is highly nutritious for cattle, especially for dairy cows, because of its high protein content and digestible fiber.

Understanding and caring for alfalfa plants

It is important for farmers to understand the different stages of development of alfalfa and what it needs to thrive to produce the maximum crop. Alfalfa requires potassium and phosphorus in the soil to grow well. Alfalfa uses sunlight to transfer energy to its leaves so the plant can produce carbohydrates for growth and energy. Alfalfa roots need well drained soil so that they are not in standing water. Alfalfa root systems typically grow 7–10 feet deep in order to reach groundwater. Alfalfa is harvested by cutting it and balling it a few times a year.



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