

# Did You Know?

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## Carob, *Ceratonia siliqua*

- Commonly known as carob, carob tree, locust bean and St. John's-bread, this small tree or shrub is an evergreen in the Fabaceae or legume family.
- It is native to the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Middle East, though it is now grown all over the world including Florida and southwestern United States.
- Carob was first cultivated by the ancient Greeks more than 4000 years ago. By the 1500s, carob was transported by the Spaniards to South American and Mexico. South Africa, India and Australia began growing it from the British.
- Carob trees are dioecious (male or female). The reddish-brown, foot-long pods that form on the female tree and can take up to a full year to ripen. When harvesting, care must be taken to not damage the flowers for the next year's harvest.
- The ripened pods produce a pulp which is made into a sweet powder that is often substituted for chocolate. Unlike chocolate, it's free of caffeine and theobromine (which is toxic to some mammals like dogs).
- The pods can be made into a powder, sold in pieces, or the sugar can be extracted to form a syrup commonly used in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries in beverages.
- The seeds are processed separately and sold as locust bean gum. The gum is used as a stabilizer, emulsifier, thickener, and to prevent the crystalizing of sugar in many processed foods. It is used to enhance the texture of processed food. In cosmetics, it is used as an adhesive or a binder, to enhance texture, stabilize liquids and as a fragrance.
- Carob is naturally high in fiber, vitamins A and B-2 and contains antioxidants. It is low in sugar and fat.
- Medicinal uses for carob include soothing upset stomachs and stopping diarrhea. The tannins in carob contain gallic acid which modern research shows to be antiallergenic, analgesic, antibacterial, antioxidant, antiviral, and antiseptic.

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