

Did You Know?



Poppy seed *Papaver somniferum*

- Native to the Middle East, the annual poppy plant is the source of culinary poppy seeds, poppy seed oil, and has been cultivated as far back as six thousand years ago.
- The poppy flower itself is a remembrance symbol of WWI. Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae wrote a poem titled “In Flanders Field” after he saw poppies growing there following a battle. Its popularity gave rise to a campaign that made the poppy the national emblem of remembrance.
- The Sumerians in ancient Mesopotamia used the opium poppy and its seeds medicinally. The plant was known as the plant of joy, or *hul gil*. It was first grown in 3400 B.C.E. by the same group of people. They used the seeds for treating a variety of ailments, including some believed, the power of invisibility.
- While the Sumerians were the first to cultivate and use the poppy, this knowledge was eventually passed to the Assyrians, Babylonians, and then to the Egyptians. Then, it went to the Minoans and eventually to Greece. Ancient Rome also loved the poppy seeds.
- The Latin name means “sleep-bringing poppy”.
- The sap in the seedpod contains opium, from which the analgesic and narcotic medicine morphine as well as the derivative heroine comes from.
- The German pharmacist Friedrich Sertürner first isolated the opium from the poppy sap in 1804 to make morphine. He chose the name morphine after Morpheus, the Greek god of dreams. It was commercially manufactured by the Merck Company in 1827.
- The most popular way of using poppy seeds in baking is as a topping for baked goods, especially muffins. They are especially popular in Eastern European cooking and baking, but are used all over the world.
- Poppy seeds form in smooth round fruits called pods, on the end of the flower stalk.
- Poppy seeds have a nutty flavor, which is accentuated when toasted.
- It takes one to two million of tiny poppy seed makes one pound.
- Growing *P. somniferum* for ornamental purposes can be illegal in some states. Consult with local law authorities.

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