



# Plants For A Future

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**Database Name:**

## Trifolium pratense - L.

**Keyword:**

### Red Clover

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Author	L.	Botanical references	17, 200
Family	<a href="#">Leguminosae</a>	Genus	<a href="#">Trifolium</a>
Synonyms			
Known Hazards	 Diseased clover, even if no symptoms of disease are visible, can contain toxic alkaloids [222].		
Range	Europe, including Britain, from Norway south and east to Spain and W. Asia.		
Habitat	Meadows, pastures and other grassy places[9], especially on calcareous soils. Usually found on circumneutral soils[17].		
Edibility Rating	 3 (1-5)	Medicinal Rating	 3 (1-5)

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### Physical Characteristics



Perennial growing to 0.6m by 0.6m at a medium rate.

It is hardy to zone 6 and is not frost tender. It is in flower from May to September, and the seeds ripen from July to October. The flowers are hermaphrodite (have both male and female organs) and are pollinated by Bees, Lepidoptera (Moths & Butterflies). It can fix Nitrogen. It is noted for attracting wildlife.

The plant prefers light (sandy), medium (loamy) and heavy (clay) soils, requires well-drained soil and can grow in nutritionally poor soil. The plant prefers acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils. It cannot grow in the shade. It requires moist soil. The plant can tolerate

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strong winds but not maritime exposure.

## Habitats

Meadow;

## Edible Uses

Edible Parts: [Flowers](#); [Leaves](#); [Root](#); [Seed](#).

Edible Uses: [Condiment](#); [Tea](#).

Leaves and young flowering heads - raw or cooked[2, 55, 105, 183]. The young leaves are harvested before the plant comes into flower, and are used in salads, soups etc[9]. On their own they can be used as a vegetable, cooked like spinach[9]. The leaves are best cooked [172]. They can be dried, powdered and sprinkled on foods such as boiled rice[183]. The leaves contain 81% water, 4% protein, 0.7% fat, 2.6% fibre and 2% ash[218]. The seed can be sprouted and used in salads. A crisp texture and more robust flavour than alfalfa (Medicago sativa)[183]. The seeds are reported as containing trypsin inhibitors[218]. These can interfere with certain enzymes that help in the digestion of proteins, but are normally destroyed if the seed is sprouted first. Flowers and seed pods - dried, ground into a powder and used as a flour[115]. The young flowers can also be eaten raw in salads[144, 172]. Root - cooked[172, 177]. A delicate sweet herb tea is made from the fresh or dried flowers[21, 55, 183]. The dried leaves impart a vanilla flavour to cakes etc[172].

## Composition

Figures in grams (g) or milligrams (mg) per 100g of food.

### Leaves (Fresh weight)

- o 0 Calories per 100g
- o Water: 81%
- o Protein: 4g; Fat: 0.7g; Carbohydrate: 0g; Fibre: 2.6g; Ash: 2g;
- o Minerals - Calcium: 0mg; Phosphorus: 0mg; Iron: 0mg; Magnesium: 0mg; Sodium: 0mg; Potassium: 0mg; Zinc: 0mg;
- o Vitamins - A: 0mg; Thiamine (B1): 0mg; Riboflavin (B2): 0mg; Niacin: 0mg; B6: 0mg; C: 0mg;
- o Reference: [218]
- o Notes:

## Medicinal Uses

[Alterative](#); [Antiscrophulatic](#); [Antispasmodic](#); [Aperient](#); [Cancer](#); [Detergent](#); [Diuretic](#); [Expectorant](#); [Miscellany](#); [Sedative](#); [Skin](#); [Tonic](#).

Red clover is safe and effective herb with a long history of medicinal

usage. It is commonly used to treat skin conditions, normally in combination with other purifying herbs such as *Arctium lappa* and *Rumex crispus*[254]. It is a folk remedy for cancer of the breast, a concentrated decoction being applied to the site of the tumour in order to encourage it to grow outwards and clear the body[254]. Flavonoids in the flowers and leaves are oestrogenic and may be of benefit in the treatment of menopausal complaints[254]. The flowering heads are alterative, antiscrofulous, antispasmodic, aperient, detergent, diuretic, expectorant, sedative and tonic[4, 21, 165, 218, 238]. It has also shown anticancer activity[172, 218], poultices of the herb have been used as local applications to cancerous growths[4]. Internally, the plant is used in the treatment of skin complaints (especially eczema and psoriasis), cancers of the breast, ovaries and lymphatic system, chronic degenerative diseases, gout, whooping cough and dry coughs[238]. The plant is normally harvested for use as it comes into flower[222, 238] and some reports say that only the flowers are used[4]. The toxic indolizidine alkaloid 'slaframine' is often found in diseased clover (even if the clover shows no external symptoms of disease). This alkaloid is being studied for its antidiabetic and anti-AIDS activity[222].

## Other Uses

Dye; Green manure; Soil reclamation.

A yellow dye is obtained from the flowers[46, 61]. The plant makes a good green manure, it is useful for over-wintering, especially in a mixture with *Lolium perenne*[54]. Deep rooting, it produces a good bulk[87]. It is a host to 'clover rot' however, so should not be used too frequently[87]. It can be undersown with cereals though it may be too vigorous[87]. It is also grown with grass mixtures for land reclamation, it has good nitrogen fixing properties[200].

## Cultivation details

Succeeds in a moist, well-drained circum-neutral soil in full sun[200]. Prefers a medium-heavy loam[87]. A short-lived perennial[200]. A very hardy plant, tolerating temperatures down to at least  $-23^{\circ}\text{C}$  [238]. A very important food plant for the caterpillars of many butterfly and moth species[30]. It is also a good bee plant[54], but not so valuable as the white clover, *T. repens*[4]. It grows well in an apple orchard, the trees will produce tastier fruit that stores better [201]. It should not be grown with camellias or gooseberries because it harbours a mite that can cause fruit drop in the gooseberries and premature budding in the camellias[201]. Very polymorphic, there are many subspecies and varieties. This species has a symbiotic relationship with certain soil bacteria, these bacteria form nodules on the roots and fix atmospheric nitrogen. Some of this nitrogen is utilized by the growing plant but some can also be used by other plants growing nearby[200]. Buttercups growing nearby depress the growth of the nitrogen bacteria by means of a root exudate[201].

## Propagation

Pre-soak the seed for 12 hours in warm water and then sow in spring in situ. If the seed is in short supply it might be better to sow it in pots in a cold frame. When they are large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and plant them out in late spring. Division in spring[238].

## Links

## References

[2] **Hedrick. U. P.** *Sturtevant's Edible Plants of the World*. Dover Publications 1972 ISBN 0-486-20459-6

Lots of entries, quite a lot of information in most entries and references.

[4] **Grieve.** *A Modern Herbal*. Penguin 1984 ISBN 0-14-046-440-9  
Not so modern (1930's?) but lots of information, mainly temperate plants.

[9] **Launert. E.** *Edible and Medicinal Plants*. Hamlyn 1981 ISBN 0-600-37216-2

Covers plants in Europe. a drawing of each plant, quite a bit of interesting information.

[17] **Clapham, Tootin and Warburg.** *Flora of the British Isles*. Cambridge University Press 1962

A very comprehensive flora, the standard reference book but it has no pictures.

[21] **Lust. J.** *The Herb Book*. Bantam books 1983 ISBN 0-553-23827-2

Lots of information tightly crammed into a fairly small book.

[30] **Carter D.** *Butterflies and Moths in Britain and Europe*. Pan 1982 ISBN 0-330-26642-x

An excellent book on Lepidoptera, it also lists their favourite food plants.

[46] **Uphof. J. C. Th.** *Dictionary of Economic Plants*. Weinheim 1959  
An excellent and very comprehensive guide but it only gives very short descriptions of the uses without any details of how to utilize the plants. Not for the casual reader.

[54] **Hatfield. A. W.** *How to Enjoy your Weeds*. Frederick Muller Ltd 1977 ISBN 0-584-10141-4

Interesting reading.

[55] **Harris. B. C.** *Eat the Weeds*. Pivot Health 1973

Interesting reading.

[61] **Usher. G.** *A Dictionary of Plants Used by Man*. Constable 1974 ISBN 0094579202

Forget the sexist title, this is one of the best books on the subject. Lists a very extensive range of useful plants from around the world

with very brief details of the uses. Not for the casual reader.

[87] **Woodward. L. Burge. P.** *Green Manures*. Elm Farm Research Centre. 1982

Green manure crops for temperate areas. Quite a lot of information on a number of species.

[105] **Tanaka. T.** *Tanaka's Cyclopaedia of Edible Plants of the World*. Keigaku Publishing 1976

The most comprehensive guide to edible plants I've come across. Only the briefest entry for each species, though, and some of the entries are more than a little dubious. Not for the casual reader.

[115] **Johnson. C. P.** *The Useful Plants of Great Britain*. 0

Written about a hundred years ago, but still a very good guide to the useful plants of Britain.

[144] **Cribb. A. B. and J. W.** *Wild Food in Australia*. Fontana 1976  
ISBN 0-00-634436-4

A very good pocket guide.

[165] **Mills. S. Y.** *The Dictionary of Modern Herbalism*. 0

An excellent small herbal.

[172] **Schofield. J. J.** *Discovering Wild Plants - Alaska, W. Canada and the Northwest*. 0

A nice guide to some useful plants in that area.

[177] **Kunkel. G.** *Plants for Human Consumption*. Koeltz Scientific Books 1984 ISBN 3874292169

An excellent book for the dedicated. A comprehensive listing of latin names with a brief list of edible parts.

[183] **Facciola. S.** *Cornucopia - A Source Book of Edible Plants*.

Kampong Publications 1990 ISBN 0-9628087-0-9

Excellent. Contains a very wide range of conventional and unconventional food plants (including tropical) and where they can be obtained (mainly N. American nurseries but also research institutes and a lot of other nurseries from around the world.

[200] **Huxley. A.** *The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening*. 1992.

MacMillan Press 1992 ISBN 0-333-47494-5

Excellent and very comprehensive, though it contains a number of silly mistakes. Readable yet also very detailed.

[201] **Allardice.P.** *A - Z of Companion Planting*. Cassell Publishers Ltd. 1993 ISBN 0-304-34324-2

A well produced and very readable book.

[218] **Duke. J. A. and Ayensu. E. S.** *Medicinal Plants of China*

Reference Publications, Inc. 1985 ISBN 0-917256-20-4

Details of over 1,200 medicinal plants of China and brief details of their uses. Often includes an analysis, or at least a list of constituents. Heavy going if you are not into the subject.

[222] **Foster. S. & Duke. J. A.** *A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants*.

*Eastern and Central N. America.* Houghton Mifflin Co. 1990 ISBN 0395467225

A concise book dealing with almost 500 species. A line drawing of each plant is included plus colour photographs of about 100 species. Very good as a field guide, it only gives brief details about the plants medicinal properties.

[238] **Bown. D.** *Encyclopaedia of Herbs and their Uses.* Dorling Kindersley, London. 1995 ISBN 0-7513-020-31

A very well presented and informative book on herbs from around the globe. Plenty in it for both the casual reader and the serious student. Just one main quibble is the silly way of having two separate entries for each plant.

[254] **Chevallier. A.** *The Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants* Dorling Kindersley. London 1996 ISBN 9-780751-303148

An excellent guide to over 500 of the more well known medicinal herbs from around the world.

## Readers Comments

### Edible Wild Plants For Tortoises

**Linda King** Sat Aug 18 18:20:37 2001

<http://www.tlady.clara.net/TortGuide/Diet.htm>

Please go to my main Diet page and click on the Plant List link at the top. This is a new section of my Tortoise Care website, and is an illustrated Edible Wild Plants list for tortoise keepers in the UK. Click on the Latin names to see the illustrations which are all original work. The information with the illustrations would be equally applicable to iguanas and herbivorous mammals.

### Trifolium pratense

Mon Jan 8 2007

[Biothemen](#) Inforamtion on medicinal uses of Red Clover in German

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