

Mucuna puriens

English: Velvet bean

Family: Fabaceae

Botanical information

A leguminous, vigorous growing annual plant. Native to China and Eastern India it is now found throughout the Tropics. The leaves are trifoliate (each leaf has three leaflets) and the bean pods 6 to 11 cm long. The flowers are dark purple.

It prefers hot and humid conditions and good rainfall. It prefers fertile soils. The optimal temperature range is 19 to 27°C.

Agricultural uses

A climbing vine that also gives good ground cover and thus helps to prevent soil erosion. It can be grown as a green manure. The plant is leguminous, and so fixes nitrogen into the soil.

Used as a feed supplement, the fresh leaves, hay or silage of mucuna stimulates the growth of many animals, such as cows, goats, sheep, pigs and poultry as. The seeds are used as concentrated feed.

Nutritional uses

The young leaves may be cooked as a vegetable. The young pods and seeds may also be cooked and eaten. The seeds may be roasted as a coffee substitute.



Constituents of mucuna beans

The beans are rich in protein, carbohydrates, lipids, fibre and minerals. They also contain alkaloids, saponins and sterols. They also contain a high concentration of L-dopa, which is a drug used for Parkinson's disease; the naturally occurring L-dopa is said to have many fewer side effects as compared to that commercially produced.

The seed pods have hairs that sting, due to their content of mucunain.

Preparation and use of mucuna tea

Dry the beans thoroughly and pound to a fine powder. Store in an air-tight container in the dark.

Pour boiling water, or a boiling mixture of water and milk, over one rounded teaspoon of the tea in a cup. Take once or twice a day. Add sugar to taste.

Medicinal uses

The beans have the following uses:

Parkinson's disease and nervous system disorders

Reducing spasms

They reduce blood pressure

They reduce blood sugar

They are diuretic.

Oedema

Intestinal gas

Worms

Stimulates the production of growth hormones

Impotency and sexual performance in men

Side effects and cautions

Few side effects have been observed, but pregnant women should not eat the beans because tests with animals have led to birth defects. Because the beans lower blood sugar, patients with hypoglycaemia or diabetes should take great care. Patients with Parkinson's disease are recommended to take mucuna only under the supervision of a doctor.