

Lentils—*Lens culinaris* Medic.; also *Lens esculenta* Moench.¹

James M. Stephens²

Lentil is a leguminous plant that has been grown in the Mediterranean region since ancient times. Seeds are reported to have been found in Egyptian tombs of the 12th dynasty (2400 BC). It is seldom grown in Florida, even in gardens, for it is more adapted to droughty conditions. Most production in the United States is centered in the Pacific Northwest. Almost 40,000 acres of lentils were produced in the US in 1972.

Description

The lentil plant is a 12–18 inch high, low, bushy, weakly upright to semi-viny annual having the general appearance of vetch. It has many soft, hairy branches with pinnately compound leaves and numerous oval leaflets. Flowers are white, lilac, or pale blue. The broad, smooth pods are only ½ inch long. Each pod bears two seeds, which are thin, lens-shaped, usually smaller than pea seed, and of various colors including brown and yellow. A bushel of dry seeds weighs about 60 pounds, and a pound contains 6,000–12,000 seeds.

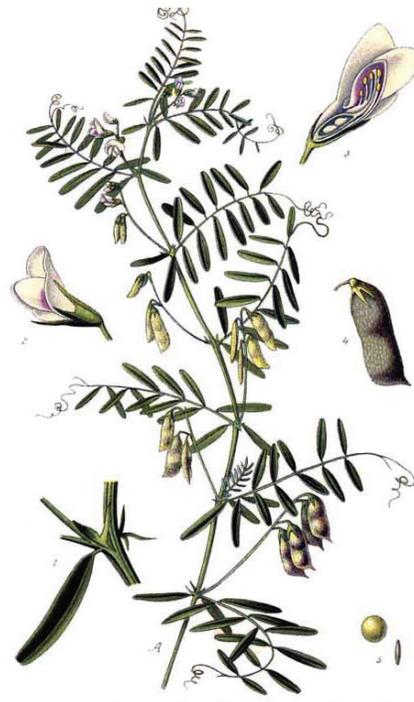


Figure 1. Lentils.
Credits: Amédée Masclef

Culture and Use

Lentils are cultivated much as are dry beans. Therefore, there must be a period of 2–3 weeks of sunny dry weather at harvest time for drying the pods. Young immature pods may be used as a vegetable. The mature dry seeds are a favorite ingredient in soups and stews. Lentils are a good source of protein, vitamin B, iron, and phosphorus.

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