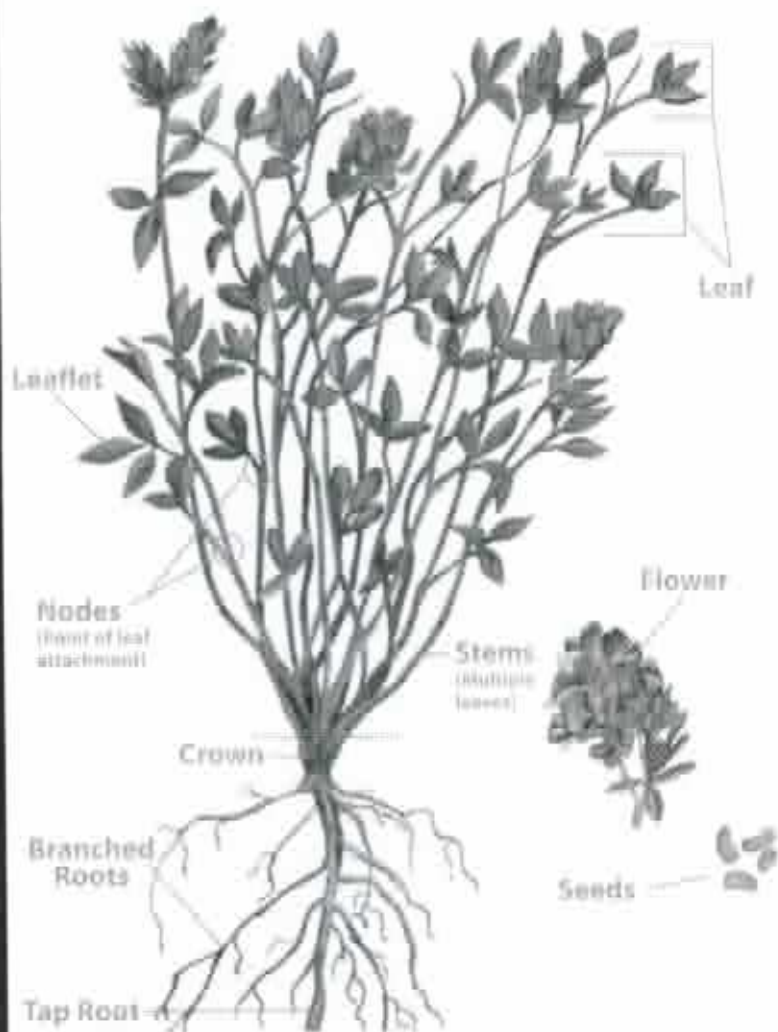




ALFALFA

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ALFALFA



Top 10 Minnesota Counties Producing All Hay in 2007:
Stearns, Otter Tail, Winona, Morrison, Wabasha, Houston,
Todd, Goodhue, Olmsted and Roseau

Alfalfa

Alfalfa is mainly used as feed for horses and cattle. It is a high-quality hay crop grown widely in the United States and in temperate regions of South America, Asia and Europe. It is the most important perennial forage legume grown in Minnesota and other states in the north central region of the United States.

Planting

Alfalfa is usually planted in April or May using a machine called a drill. The drill places the seed into the ground about a half-inch deep. Each row is about 4 to 5 inches apart. Alfalfa is a perennial crop, which means it will grow in the same field three to five years in a row without replanting. Farmers like alfalfa because it is a legume plant which places nitrogen in the soil. The nitrogen is food for the soil and helps feed other plants such as corn that may be grown later in the same field.

Harvest

The alfalfa plant is harvested two to four times each summer. Harvest occurs at 28 to 35-day intervals in late May to early October. The alfalfa plant is cut before it produces its flowers. When alfalfa is harvested, a machine cuts each plant about four inches from the ground.

Uses

The alfalfa plant may be used as silage or wet feed for cattle. It is chopped into fine pieces and placed in a round building called a silo for storage. Another way to use alfalfa is to cut it, leave it in the field to dry and then use a machine called a baler to make bales of hay for cattle, sheep and horses. People sometimes eat alfalfa, but it is alfalfa sprouts that are used in tossed salads.

On The Front

A. Alfalfa Plant

Alfalfa is a leafy plant, which grows 2 to 3 feet tall. More than 33 million acres of alfalfa are planted in the United States each year.

B. Alfalfa Flower

The alfalfa flower has purple/yellow flowers which produce the seeds. These pods of seeds are twisted to form up to five spirals and are formed following insect pollination.

C. Alfalfa Seed


Alfalfa seeds are kidney-shaped, very small and normally olive-green in color (average 200,000 seeds per pound).

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

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1. In the box provided, draw an alfalfa plant, alfalfa flower, and alfalfa seed.



2. How is alfalfa mainly used?

3. What are other uses for alfalfa?

4. Using your map of Minnesota counties, create a symbol for alfalfa (hay) and mark the top 10 counties that produced hay in 2007.