

FLAX.

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The cultivation of flax and the manufacture of its fibre date back to a very remote period. The great value of this plant has been known and appreciated for probably five thousand years past. The fact that the Egyptian mummies were wrapped in linen, shows that the use of the fibre of flax is very ancient. It was an old and well established industry in Egypt at the dawn of the Christian era. Some 3000 years ago the Phoenicians devoted much attention to the cultivation of the plant, and subsequently the Greeks and Romans made the working of flax fibre a part of the household duties.

This fibre, next to cotton, is the most valuable and universally employed textile in the whole range of vegetable fibres, and the plant can be grown in nearly every part of the world where the climate is temperate. It is cultivated to a considerable extent in Great Britain, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, France, Russia, Germany, Austria, Spain and Portugal. It is also grown over a large area in North America, and to some extent in portions of South America, notably in Argentina, where it is cultivated chiefly for its seed. It is still grown in Egypt, also in Algeria and Natal. Japan has entered on flax cultivation commercially, so also have the Australian colonies, where there is said to be a wide range of soil and climate favourable to its growth. In India also there are large areas devoted to the cultivation of the flax plant, but in that country it is grown chiefly for its seed.

CULTIVATION OF FLAX IN AMERICA

Flax was brought to America by the early colonists, and the working of flax fibre was one of the earliest colonial industries, which was encouraged on every hand. Within the past hundred years it is said to have been a prevailing custom among farmers in the Eastern States to grow flax and to have it retted, scutched, hackled and spun by members of their household. A similar custom still prevails among some of the thrifty wives and daughters of the French-Canadian farmers in the rural districts of Quebec.

THE FLAX PLANT.

The flax plant of commerce received from the great botanist Linneus the name of *Linum usitatissimum*. From the generic name *Linum* the words linen, lint and linseed are derived, while the specific name *usitatissimum*, which means 'most useful,' was given to it in consideration of the service it has rendered the human family in supplying material for clothing.

Flax is an annual plant which grows from 20 to 40 inches in height or sometimes higher. The stem branches more or less, the number of branches depending largely on the quantity of seed sown and the relative closeness of the plants. The flower, when fully expanded, measures nearly an inch in diameter, and is usually of a purplish