



by Judy Fleming, HCMG

Medicinal Plants: Chia

Salvia hispanica, Chia — is it a pet or a plant? I was first introduced to this herb in 1969 as a supplement for energy and weight loss. After eating the seeds, I was not hungry, and I did not sleep for two days, so this was a great boon to cramming before finals. In pre-Columbian times, chia was a main component of the Aztec and Mayan diets. It was known as the running food was and used for endurance. Indians running from the Colorado River to the California coast to trade turquoise for seashells would only bring the Chia seed for their nourishment. So what is it exactly?

Chia is an annual herb growing to about 3 ft tall, with opposite leaves 1.5 to 3 inches long and 1 to 2 inches broad. It flowers in July and August where the blooms appear at the end of spikes. The plant is hardy from USDA Zones 9-12. Wikipedia identifies Chia as a species of flowering plant in the mint family, Lamiaceae, native to central and southern Mexico and Guatemala. It is still used in Mexico and Guatemala, with the seeds sometimes ground, while whole seed is used for nutritious drinks and as a food source.

The leaves and stems of *Salvia hispanica* plants taste great in sandwiches, soups, salads and stews. The seeds of the plant contain high amounts of omega-3 fatty acids, even more so than flax seeds. The seeds can be added to many recipes especially cookies and breads. Another advantage over flax is that chia's high content of antioxidants allow the seeds to be stored for long periods without becoming rancid. And, unlike flax, they do not have to be ground to make their nutrients available to the body. In some circles, it is know as a "super food" due to its nutritional value and the effect it has in facilitating slower absorption of carbohydrates, thus raising the glycemic index of the other foods consumed. This is a tremendous benefit for diabetics. For additional scientific information about this super food please read *Chia, The Ancient Food of the Future* by William Anderson at <http://getchia.com/about-chia/the-ancient-food-of-the-future>.