

Linum usitatissimum L.

Standardized Common Name: Flax

Other Common Name: Linseed

Family: Linaceae

Taxonomy: *Linum* includes nearly 200 species native to temperate and subtropical habitats, especially in the Mediterranean region. *Linum usitatissimum* is classified within Sect. *Linum*, whose species have blue flowers and alternate, glabrous leaves without glands. It grows wild from western Europe to southwest Asia and has been widely cultivated.

Description: Annual herb; stem erect or ascending, 30–90 cm high, unbranched except at apex. Leaves alternate, sessile, linear, 1.5–4 cm long, with 3 parallel veins. Inflorescences terminal, 2–10-flowered. Sepals 5, 5–9 mm long, overlapping, ovate with short acuminate apex, conspicuous midvein; margins of outer sepals entire, those of inner sepals dry and ciliate. Petals 5, blue, 10–15 mm long, with short claw and spreading obdeltoid limb. Fertile stamens 5, staminodes 5; filaments fused at the base; anthers blue. Ovary superior, compound; styles 5, with linear stigmas. Fruit a loculicidal capsule, 6–9 mm long, globose, with beak ca. 1 mm long, 5-valved, 10-seeded. Seeds flat, mucilaginous, ovate to lanceolate-oblong, 4–6 mm long, shiny, brown.

Parts in Commerce: Seeds

Identification:

- Narrowly ovate (4–6 mm long, 2–3 mm broad), flattened
- Base rounded
- Apex acute, point rounded and curved to one side
- Surface brown, glossy, minutely pitted
- Pale yellow ridge along one edge
- Hilum and micropyle along edge near pointed end, on concave side of apical curve
- Contains two large flat cotyledons surrounded by thin layer of endosperm, both yellowish
- Taste mucilaginous, oily
- Odor very faint, unless ground
- When soaked in water, swells and produces mucilage

References:

Davis PH. *Linum*. In: Davis PH, ed. *Flora of Turkey and the East Aegean Islands*. Vol. 2. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; 1967:425–450.

Ockendon DJ, and Walters SM. *Linum*. In: Tutin TG, Heywood VH, Burges NA, et al., eds. *Flora Europaea*. Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1968:206–211.

Youngken HW. *Text-Book of Pharmacognosy*, 5th ed. Philadelphia, PA: The Blakiston Company; 1943:485–487.

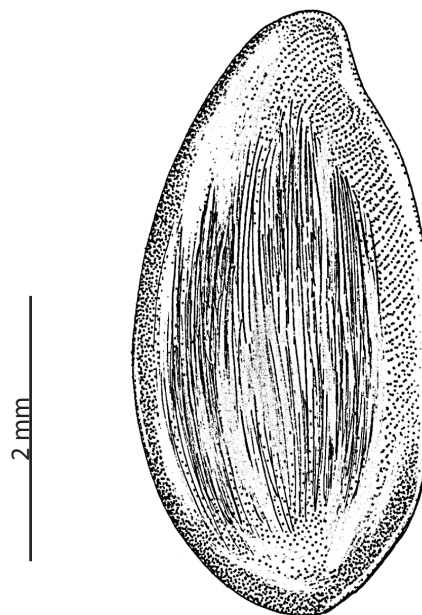


Figure 39: *Linum usitatissimum* seed.