

# The Secrets of Saffron







# Crocus *sativus*

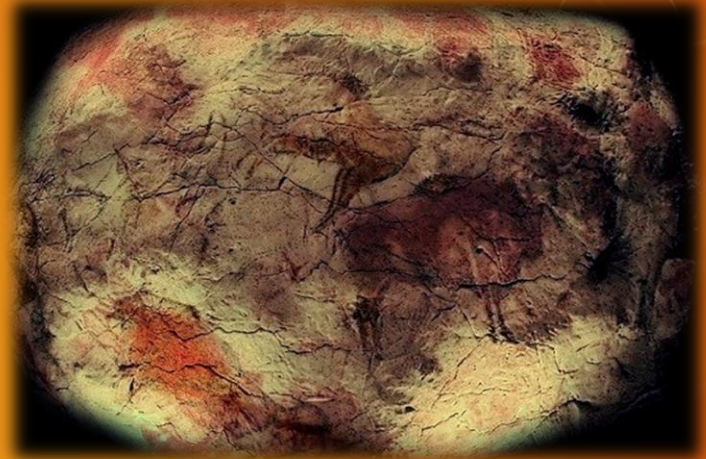
- Family: Iridaceae
- Origin: Probably Eastern Greece or Crete
- Height: 3" – 6"
- Flowering: autumn
- Perennial corm
- 5 cultivars around the world





# Origin predates the Bible:

Example of caves in Iraq



Traces of saffron are found on the walls of Iraqi caves and in tattered threads pulled from disintegrating carpets and funeral shrouds of the ancient Persian court.



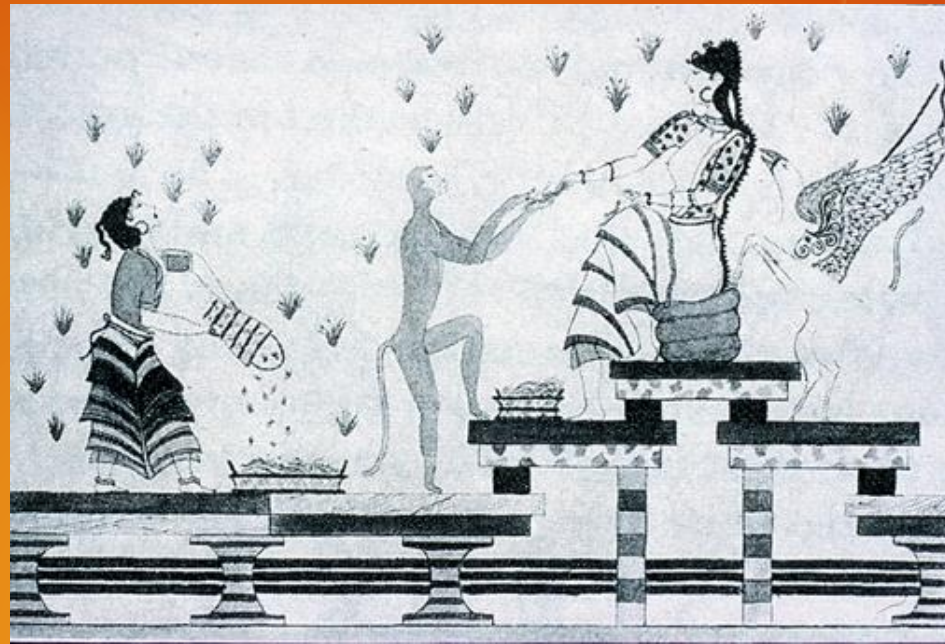
Xeste 3

Entrance to the  
cave



Fresco of Women Gathering Saffron  
found on Minoan Crete – Xeste 3 caves  
1600 – 1500 B.C.

A rendering of  
The Mistress of  
Animals (on the  
throne)



Close up of the  
mistress

The blue monkeys  
of Crete





# Cleopatra

Used saffron in her warm bath because of the coloring and cosmetic properties. History says she also used saffron before encounters with men, thinking the scent would be enchanting.



To the nations of Eastern Asia, Saffron's **yellow** dye was the perfection of beauty and its odour a perfect ambrosia.

.....Maude Grieve

**A Modern Herbal**

Saffron yellow formed part of the dress and shoes of the Persian Kings.



Medieval European illuminated manuscripts such as this:  
13<sup>th</sup> Century depiction of Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket's assassination.

Dyes of saffron were often used to provide hues of yellow and orange.



# Culpeper's Complete Herbal

'It is an herb of the Sun, and under the Lion. Saffron is endowed with great virtues, for it refreshes the spirits, and is good against fainting-fits and the palpitation of the heart'.....A.D. 1653



Women in France have known the secrets of saffron since the 13<sup>th</sup> century



CA 1440 - Paris



# England

Saffron grew well in the north Essex countryside. Chipping Walden changed the town's name to Saffron Walden to show the importance of the crop to the local area. The town's coat of arms features the crocus in its design.



Visit Saffron Walden



Throughout the ages, saffron has been used to dye cloth.





Cotton



Wool

Cloth dyed with saffron – notice the colors!



Silk

# Irish Bagpiper with his saffron colored kilt.



Young Buddhist monks in India wearing various shades of saffron shirts.



# What does saffron mean?

It's possible that crocus comes from the Sumerian tribes of the Middle East, evolving via the Arabic word;

**sahafarn- meaning thread** and

**Za'faran-meaning yellow.**

# It's all in a name.

Spanish – azafran

French – Safran

Italian – Zafferano

Portuguese – agafrao

Swedish – Saffran

German – Saffran

Finnish – Saframi

Hungarian – Safrany

Russian – Shafran

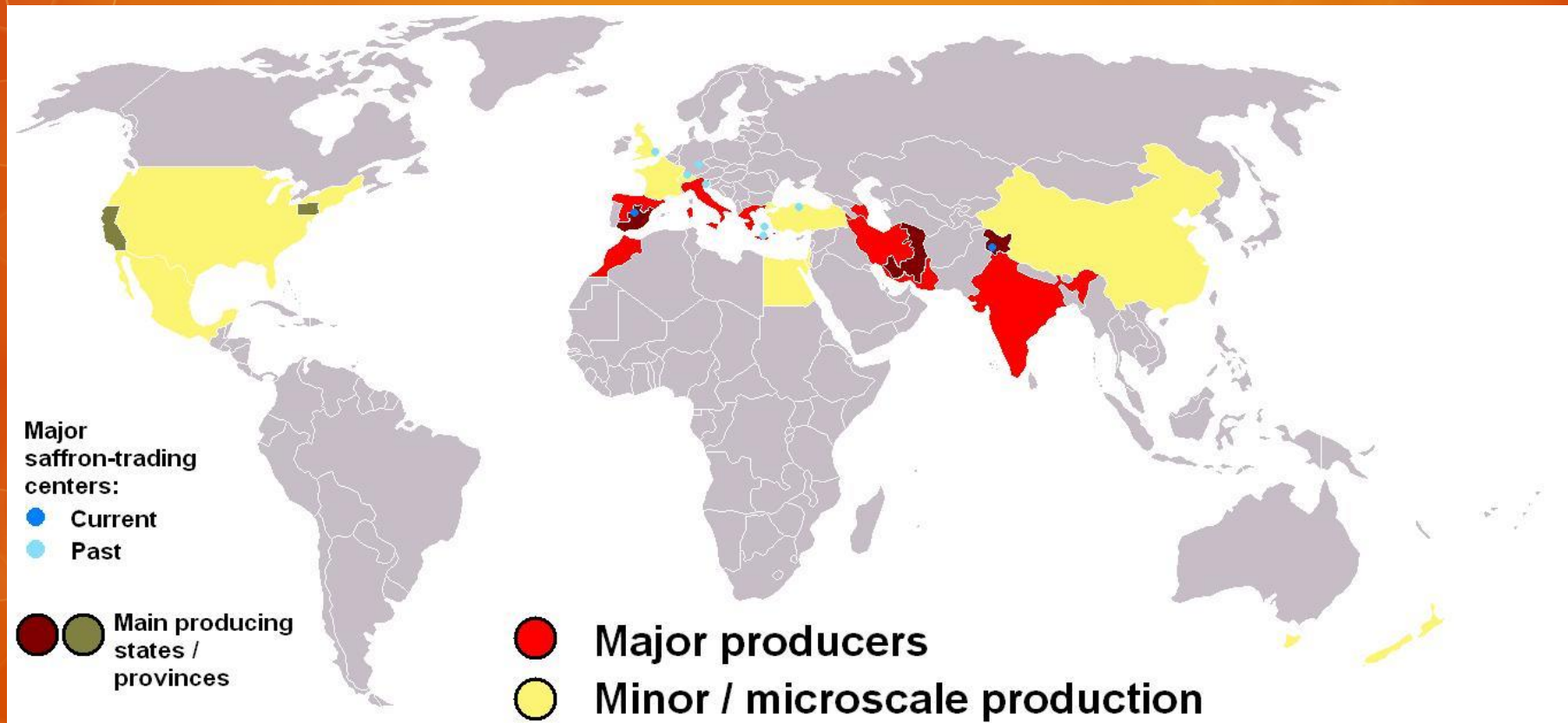
Arabic – zaFraran

Hindi – kesar

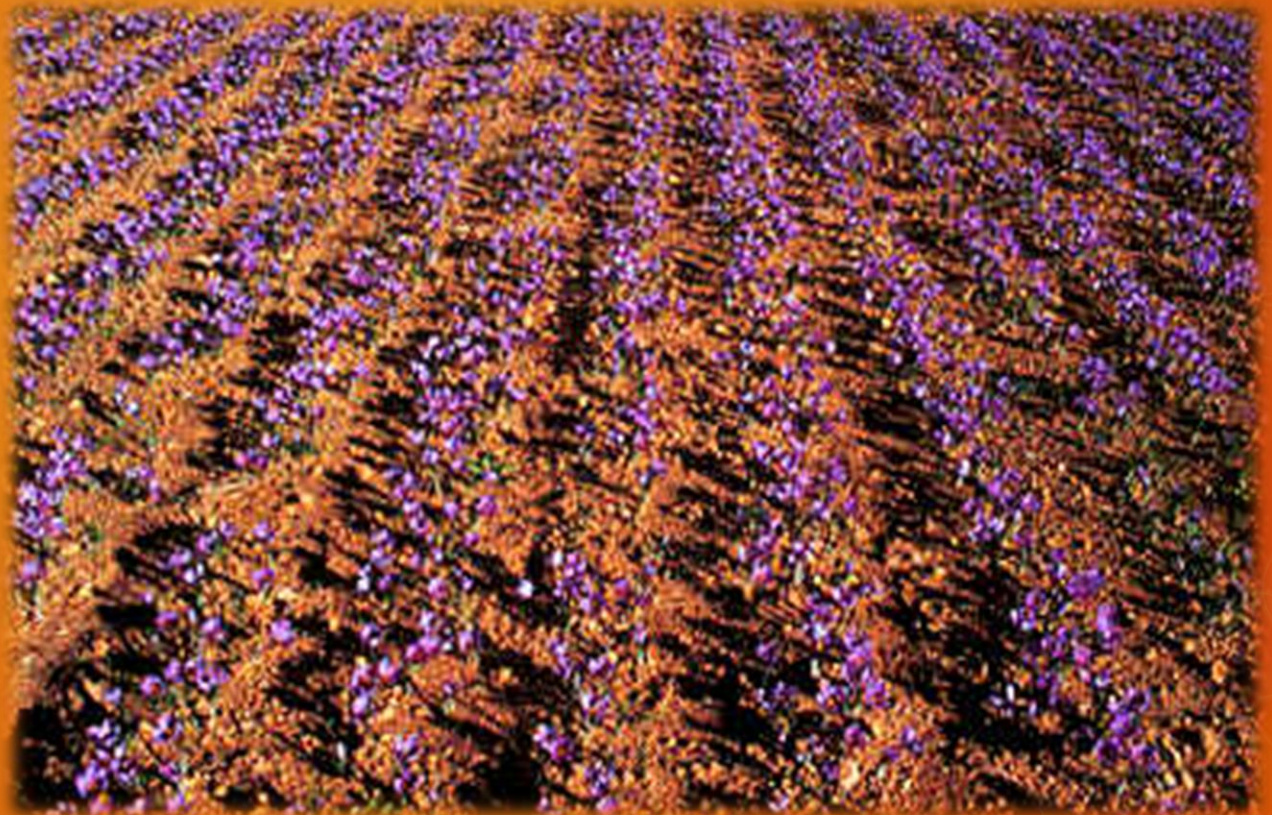
Chinese – Fan nung hua

Japanese - safuran

# World Saffron Cultivation



# Why is Saffron the most expensive spice in the World?



# Each corm is planted by hand.



Saffron crops mature within 4-6 weeks in the autumn.

Flowers must be gathered in a day, by hand, when they are open and ready to be harvested. Some fields are harvested day and night until the field is bare of blooms.





Each flower is gathered by hand!



# Harvest Day in Italy





# Dehydrating filaments in Italy





Each thread is hand counted and packaged for sale.



The petals of the plant are fed to the livestock.



NOTE: New research available on the uses of the petal

# Saffron Grower in Navelli, Italy



'By tradition we don't eat it, it has always been what buys our children shoes.'

Valentino Di Marzio,  
President of Saffron Growers  
in Navelli.

The saying goes~ at  
Christmas Mass you know  
who had a good saffron  
season~ you can smell it on  
their overcoats.

The spice is traditionally  
stored in the closet or  
armoire.







This plant is not saffron, but is often sold as the real thing!  
*Carthamus tinctorius*- *Safflower*



# Safflower

Mexican Saffron  
is not authentic  
Saffron!

*Use caution*  
with your  
purchase



# Saffron Uses:



# Food adventures around the world

Sweden – St. Lucia Buns

British – Saffron Cake

France – bouillabaisse

Italy – Risotto

Spain – Paella

Pennsylvania Dutch – Chicken  
and Noodles



# Saffron Perfume!



# Saffron Liqueurs





Wooden carved saffron storage eggs from Pennsylvania Dutch famous wood carver, Joseph Lehn from 19<sup>th</sup> century. American saffron survived cultivation into modern times mainly in Lancaster County.





# Medicinal uses of saffron

Avicenna (980-1037 AD) – mentioned saffron used as a heart tonic, eye strengthener, aphrodisiac, digestive and anti-inflammatory

14<sup>th</sup> century saffron was of importance for the treatment of the Black Death

1921 – England – a witness testified the use of saffron 'tea' flavored with brandy was used in cases of measles.

Study continues today for the uses in; depression, arthritis, Alzheimer's, appetite suppression, inflammation and much more..... stay tuned!

It is the policy of The Herb Society of America not to advise or recommend herbs for medicinal or health use. Please consult a health care provider before pursuing any herbal treatments.



Presented by: Susan Liechty, March 2017: University of Vermont  
Saffron Workshop  
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# Happy Spring!!!



Saffron Peeps