

## Facts about dry land vegetation <Part 4>

In this forth part of the series, I would like to introduce one of the most common dishes in the Arab region: chick pea (*Cicer arietinum*). *Hummus* is the Arabic word for chick pea.

When I was working at the agricultural experiment station in the old capital Al Ain in the UAE in the mid 1970s, there was a restaurant which was our favorite among us. It was a clean and a little trendy Lebanese restaurant with waiters in white shirts and black pantaloons. I went there almost every day as I also became a friend with the waiters. The dishes I first learned about were *hummus*, *muttabal* and *tabbouleh*. *Hummus* is paste made with mashed boiled chick pea, garlic, *tahini* (sesame paste), olive oil and lemon juice. It is eaten with Arabian bread called *khubz*. *Hummus*, *khubz* and pickles are placed on the table before the main dish is served, and I could not help eating pieces of *khubz* dipped in hummus. It is rather delicious. We were hungry researchers and kept eating *hummus* and *khubz* so that we were often already full by the time the main dish was served. *Muttabal* is a paste made from grilled eggplant. This is also delicious. This may be more to the taste of Japanese. *Tabbouleh* is a stylish salad with finely chopped Italian parsley, mixed with onions, tomatoes and coarsely ground wheat called *bulgur*. It is easy to remember the name *tabbouleh*, if we associate the name with the Japanese phrase “*tabe-lo*” meaning “eat”!

*Hummus*



*Muttabal*



*Tabbouleh*

*Hummus* in Arabic simply means chick pea. If you put the peas on your palm and look at each of them carefully, you can understand why it is called a chick pea. Each pea actually looks like a chick. Living in the Middle East, there are lots of opportunities to eat beans. One particularly famous bean is *foul*: the broad

bean. When I was working for the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in Dubai, Egyptian colleagues opened newspaper on the table in the morning and started having *foul* for breakfast. Colleagues surrounded the softly cooked *foul*, simply seasoned with olive oil and lemon, and eaten with small pieces of *khubz*. There often were breakfast parties like this. And the best soup is *shuraba adas*. *Shuraba* is soup and *adas* means lentil. Especially during hot summer, *shuraba adas* with lemon juice will help you overcome the summer heat! Living in the Middle East, we encounter a variety of beans. However, I never saw a *hummus* field in the Gulf.



Harvested chick pea



In the mid-1990s, I took a small boat from Tartus on the Mediterranean coast of Syria to a small island called Arwad. It is a historic island where Phoenicians started living and it was also once a base for the Crusaders. On the boat, children had small plants with small round fruit like things. They were eating green beans in the pods. Asked what there were eating, surprisingly they replied that it was *hummus*. I had only seen *hummus* in paste form, and it was an astonishing encounter with green chick pea! After that, when I visited the field with local extension officers, I sometimes ate green *hummus* pinched from the farmers’ fields as I engaged in local surveys. Eating green chick pea seems to be something people like doing in spring. It is probably like the Japanese people eating *Edamame* (green/young soybean) in summer with some drinks.



Green/young chick pea

