



The facts about flax

Linseed, also known as flax, has come a long way since it was used to protect cricket bats. Now it is a health-boosting supplement used in detox. Clare Skelton, of Flax Farm near Horsham, describes its many benefits

Clare Skelton became interested in the health-giving properties of linseed oil during an awful period in her life.

She said: "I had been made redundant in 2002 and I was building my own house. Unfortunately I ended up financially high and dry in an unfinished house, feeling vulnerable and suffering from terrible rosacea."

A friend suggested that Clare try linseed oil, usually used as a supplement, in a few recipes. "I was getting the oil for free and using a lot of it, and within four days I had noticed that my skin wasn't so dry and sore. As I carried on using it, even my bad back and depression melted away."

Claire grows, presses and bakes the bronze and gold linseed at Flax Farm near Horsham, and sells the products from her website (www.flaxfarm.co.uk) and a prestigious stall at Borough Market in London. The tasty Flaxjacks are very popular. "I only originally made them to prove that linseed tastes great. In fact, they could be a business all by themselves."

"I believe that food should supply all the nutrients you need, and people shouldn't need to take supplements. Linseed oil tastes good, so I started selling it as a food. You start to get quite passionate about it!" Claire is evangelical about the powers of linseed, but its magic ingredient, Omega-3, is worshipped everywhere. We are constantly bombarded with adverts



praising the fashionable nutrient, which occurs in oily fish and was previously marketed as an expensive supplement essential for children's development.

Unfortunately, fish are subject to ocean pollutants such as mercury and the purity of the supplement cannot be guaranteed: "Our oil comes from the lovely, clean Sussex countryside" says Claire. "We are in the process of registering as organic – the food production side of the business is already fully organic, but the farm is still a work in progress."

The Omega 3 that occurs in linseed is the same as that found in human breast milk, so the benefit to children is indisputable. Linseed also contains substances called phytoestrogens that balance hormones during the monthly cycle and the menopause. Ground linseed is very wholesome and is so good

for the digestion that Clare is permitted by both Trading Standards and the EEC to advertise it as a digestive aid, and it can help chronic problems such as constipation and Irritable Bowel Syndrome. "I never even thought about my digestion before," says Claire "But when you start using linseed you realise what it's meant to be like."

Everything you need to know about... Linseed

Linseed oil is suitable for diabetics, coeliacs and vegans and is wheat and gluten free

Linseed oil has 60 times more Omega-3 than olive oil

Flax and linseed are the same thing
Most linseed oil comes from China or Argentina

Bronze, brown and golden linseed have the same nutritional properties

Omega-3

Omega-3 is a sparse nutrient in nature, usually found in oily fish. Because we eat so much fat, it is important for our cell development that we also have Omega-3

Omega-3 produces anti-inflammatories and sufferers of asthma, eczema and rosacea benefit from regular use

Athletes take Omega-3 to avoid muscle damage during exercise, and speed up their recovery time.