

Hemp ^[1]

Hemp

by David Southern, 2006; Additional research provided by Kelly Agan; Revised December 2021

Hemp is the generic term for *Cannabis sativa* ^[2] (or in its wild form, *Cannabis indica*), an annual herb used for millennia as a source of fiber for rope, cloth, and paper and also as a psychotropic drug. In colonial North Carolina hemp was one of many [naval stores](#) ^[3] exported, and its cultivation was encouraged on both sides of the Atlantic throughout the eighteenth century. In more recent years it has been designated a "controlled substance," for, though the form bred for fiber has little or no psychoactive potential, the species is the raw source of marijuana and its refined derivatives; cannabis cultivation in the United States—excepting the smallest amounts grown with a government license—has been illegal since 1937.

The greatest instance of hemp advocacy in eighteenth century North Carolina belongs to Governor [William Tryon's](#) ^[4] administration. Tryon pitched the efficacies of the crop before the Assembly in 1760 and again two years later, resulting in a bill that was passed on 2 Dec. 1762. In 1766 the Assembly further passed an "Act for Establishing Public Warehouses in the Towns of Halifax and Campbleton, for the Inspection of Hemp and Flax." These warehouses were to be supplied with bonded inspectors and equipment for weighing and compressing the fiber for exportation. It was directed that they be open from 1 November to 1 January and again from 1 March to 1 May. The inspectors were to label the various batches by point of origin, mark them as dew-retted (or soaked) or water-retted, and issue certificates. There were severe penalties for counterfeiting certificates.

As commodities for export, hemp and flax went the unfortunate way of many other ill-fated colonial endeavors. Though the [climate](#) ^[5] and soil were right for hemp culture, the logistics of transport were prohibitive, meaning that hemp never became a crucial commodity for export. A pandemic of drug use in the second half of the twentieth century brought the plant's cultivation back into favor; marijuana has become a persistent social and legal problem. In some of the more remote reaches of North Carolina, including the hill country, the traditional home of illegal distilleries, marijuana farming has largely replaced moonshining.

Although both industrial hemp and marijuana come from the same plant species, *Cannabis sativa*, there is a distinction between the two plants, related to the relative amount of plant fiber and the psychoactive compound THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) present. Industrial hemp is considered by definition to be much higher in plant fiber and low in THC. In the United States, it is illegal to grow hemp without a permit from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and industrial hemp can be grown by permit. The use of components of industrial hemp, especially the oil and fiber, have been used for centuries to manufacture a variety of useful products, including industrial oils, personal care products, cooking oils, animal beddings, and cloth. And this is what is referred to as "industrial hemp." Today, more than 30 countries grow industrial hemp as a significant agricultural product.

In 2014, the U.S. Congress passed the Agricultural Act of 2014 with a provision allowing designated research institutions and state departments of agriculture to grow industrial hemp as a pilot program under permit. In 2018, the U.S. Congress passed additional farm legislation that legalized growing hemp -- the low THC type, not the type that is used for marijuana. In 2015, the North Carolina General Assembly created the state's Industrial Hemp Commission to oversee implementation of a pilot industrial hemp production program under the 2014 federal law, and the state continues to operate under the 2014 legislation. Industrial hemp production is now legal in the state, but only under the pilot program and subject to temporary rules created in 2017. Because only laboratory tests can determine the difference between marijuana and industrial hemp, farm production of hemp is still regulated and it remains illegal to grow hemp without a license.

Reference:

Jack Frazier, *The Great American Hemp Industry* (1991).

Additional Resources:

"Poisonous Plants of North Carolina," North Carolina State University, 1997:
<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/poison/Cannasa.htm> ^[6].

Johnson, Renee. "Hemp as an Agricultural Commodity." Congressional Research Service, June 22, 2018. <https://fas.org/srgp/crs/misc/RL32725.pdf> ^[7]

North Carolina Office of Administrative Hearings. State of North Carolina, Industrial Hemp Commission, temporary rules *02 NCAC 62 .0101-.0109*, <http://reports.oah.state.nc.us/ncac.asp?folderName=%5CTitle%2002%20-%20Agriculture%20and%20Consumer%20Services%5CChapter%2062%20-%20Industrial%20Hemp%20Commission> ^[8].

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Authors:

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From:

Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.^[12]

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