Annatto is a natural carotenoid—extracted from the red, oily outer layer of the seeds of Bixa orellana, a tropical shrub. Annatto’s properties of good heat stability, as well as solubility in water and oil provide flexibility for use in a variety of applications.

Annatto is, for the most part, commercially grown for its dye product and for its seeds. The seeds are used to produce a spice used to flavor Caribbean, Mexican and Latin American dishes, while also providing a bright and exotic appearance. Virtually any yellow or orange food product may be successfully colored with annatto, which also acts as an antioxidant and can often improve the stability of a product. Annatto is especially suited for coloring dairy products such as cheese, ice cream and yogurt, and finds further applications in popcorn (oil/butter), confectionary products, snack foods, dry mixes and soft drinks.