



# Fennel

## Foeniculum vulgare

Fennel's history is as rich as its flavor! For centuries fennel has been utilized as a food, medicine, herb, and even insect repellent. In ancient Greece, fennel played a significant role in celebrations of the gods and goddesses. It was planted in the temple gardens in their honor and worshippers wore crowns of the feathery leaves. In Greek mythology knowledge sometimes came to humans from Mt. Olympus in the form of a fiery coal contained in a fennel stalk.

The ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans believed fennel an excellent aid for digestion, bronchial troubles, poor eyesight, and nervous conditions. Today, in India, fennel seed is used for seasoning as well as chewed after the meal as a breath freshener and digestive aid. Nutritionally, fennel is very low in calories, but offers significant vitamin A and calcium, potassium, and iron.

Fennel grows wild around much of the world, but two varieties are cultivated: the bulbous Florence fennel and the common fennel grown for its seed and leaves. Belonging to the Umbel family, it is related to carrots, celery, parsley, dill (which it resembles in looks), and anise (which it resembles in flavor).

Fennel thrives in warm, moist climates, hence its success in Mediterranean cuisine. In northern states cultivating fennel is a tenuous thing. Seedlings are planted in the garden after danger of frost, and if all goes well, they're ready for harvest by midsummer and may continue to be available through early fall.

## Cooking Tips

- Wash fennel bulb, trimming off any damaged areas or woody parts of the stalk.
- Try crunching a fennel stem or a slice of the bulb to familiarize yourself with the flavor. You might find it grows on you quickly.
- Try substituting for celery in most any recipe.
- Fennel can be baked, steamed, or sautéed with excellent results.
- Try cutting fennel into quarters, drizzle with olive oil, and bake until tender, about 35 minutes.
- Try a sauté of fennel, artichoke hearts, zucchini, tomatoes, sweet bell pepper, thyme, and a dash of salt and pepper.
- Steam fennel and chill it along with the other vegetables; dress with a spoonful of lemon juice, olive oil, chopped chives or green onion, and salt and pepper.
- Cut raw fennel into slices and use for dipping. To enjoy natural flavor, try dipping slices into a small bowl of extra-virgin olive oil seasoned with salt and pepper.
- Use feathery leaves as a fresh herb for seasoning. Try using it in place of dill. Fennel is excellent on baked or broiled fish with butter and lemon.
- Italians use fennel as part of an antipasto platter or for dessert along with a soft goat cheese.
- Add to soups, pureed or chopped. Slices can be sautéed first to lock in flavors.

## Storage Tips

- Store fennel in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.
- The delicate leaves will go limp. Wrap them in a moist towel and refrigerate.