

Fennel

(Foeniculum vulgare)

Fennel is one of nine Anglo-Saxon herbs known for secret powers. In ancient days, a bunch of fennel hung over a cottage door on Midsummer's Eve was said to prevent the effects of witchcraft. Today, if witches aren't bothersome, you may want to try nibbling on the herb's seeds, as Roman women did centuries ago, to help depress your appetite.

Culinary uses

When eaten fresh, fennel has a licoricelike flavor similar to that of anise. Chop the leaves and toss them into a salad, or sprinkle over grilled seafood. The seeds add a vigorous flavor to breads, sausages, curries, and even apple pie.

Medicinal uses

A fennel tea is said to help digestion. Women in Roman times believed that fennel prevented obesity.

Cultivation

Seeds can be planted in autumn to ensure early germination in the spring; otherwise plant seeds in spring in rich, well-drained soil (not clay). Keep the bed moist for two weeks or until leaves appear - but do not overwater after that. Do not plant fennel near dill, coriander, bush beans, or tomatoes.