Fennel

Foeniculum vulgare



Height: Up to 1.5m (6ft)

Suitable for: A warm sunny position, rich well drained soil.

Summary: Fennel is a tall elegant perennial herb with feathery bright green foliage and colourful yellow flowers.

More information:

Fennel makes a handsome and graceful backdrop to any border. The whole plant is sweetly scented with an aromatic, aniseed fragrance and flavour. It flourishes in warm sunny positions but will not tolerate cold, damp soils.

For a constant supply of leaves for the kitchen the flowering stems should be removed, however for ornamental purposes these are one of its most attractive features.

Fennel is used a great deal in French and Italian cuisine. The tender leaves are used most especially with fish and salads also finely chopped in sauces. The strongest flavour is in the seeds which dry well for winter use.

Barbecue Fish flavoured with Fennel

Fennel enhances the flavour of oily fish, cooked whole either on the BBQ or under the grill.

Wash and dry whole cleaned fish such as mackerel or red mullet and sprinkle lightly with sea salt. Fill the inside of each fish with as many fennel leaves as possible. Brush with oil and grill or BBQ for 10 – 12 minutes until brown on both sides.

Arrange more fennel stalks on a serving dish and lay the fish on top of them to serve, garnished with lemon wedges.

Fennel plants can be grown in the kitchen garden as companion plants. They attract beneficial insects, such as hoverflies, which attack garden pests. The flower stems make a long lasting cut flower for the house. However it should never be planted too close to beans, tomatoes or kohl rabi as it is said to badly affect their growth.

Fennel was used with other herbs in medieval times as a preventative to witchcraft, traditionally hung over doorways on midsummer's' eve. Nowadays it has many more orthodox medicinal uses, one of which is as an aid to the digestion of fatty food. Perfumery, toothpaste, soap and airfresheners also contain its perfume.

Florence or bulb fennel *(Foeniculum vulgare Dulce)* is a different variety grown as an annual vegetable crop and is widely available from greengrocers.