Cumin (black) seeds

Nigella sativa



Height: 20 – 30cm

Suitable for: Sunny spot in rich moist soil.

Summary: Black cumin is a lovely annual with masses of delicate, white or pale blue, flowers amidst fine, lacy foliage. The seeds are black, and form in puffed up ball shaped seed heads. They are used as a spice mainly in Indian and Eastern cuisine.

More information:

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Nigella sativa is easy to grow in any good garden soil in full sun. Do remember though, it is a greedy plant and will slow down the growth of near neighbours especially legumes. Direct sown seeds are usually more successful than transplanted ones.

- Once the soil is warm sow 2 – 3 mm deep and lightly cover with soil, weeding is easier if sown in rows 30 cm apart, but broadcast seed is easy enough to keep weed-free due to the lacy foliage of Nigella.
- Sow at 3 - 4 week intervals throughout spring and summer for a constant display of flowers.
- It is possible to sow in autumn for earlier flowers the next year, but be aware that a harsh winter may mean that the seedlings do not survive.

The seeds are used as a spice in many cuisines, they have an aroma similar to fennel, and a pungent flavour a little like nutmeg. Although they are not related to either.

Harvest as the pods start to dry but before they split.

The dry roasted seeds are used as a spice in curries, vegetables, pulses and bread in the Indian continent, and also the Far & Middle East. They are an integral part of the popular Indian 5 spice mix of panch phoron.

The stems and seed heads can be harvested once mature to dry and use in dried flower arrangements.

There is archaeological evidence that black cumin cultivation dates back far into the past, with seeds found in Ancient Egypt, even in the tomb of Tutankhamun.