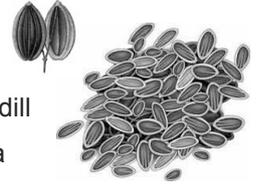


Dill



Dill is a green herb with wiry, thread-like leaves, which grow in clusters. Dill has a strong, distinctive taste - a combination of fennel, anise and celery - with warm, slightly bitter undertones. Both leaves and seeds are used as a seasoning. The light brown seeds are about 3.5 mm long, with a winged and oval shape. They are actually the fruit, divided in two, which split after harvesting. One side of the seed is flat, with two ridges; the other side is convex with three ridges and three oil channels. The green fernlike leaves are wispy, and the flowers are yellow. Each plant is a single stem, reaching about 25cm at maturity some couple of months after the seeds are sown. In early autumn, the



flowers go to seed and will readily self-sow if not harvested. Dill seed is reminiscent of caraway, aromatic, sweet, citrusy, but also slightly bitter. It is hard to tell dill and fennel apart, as they are closely related. The difference is dill is an annual, while fennel is a perennial; dill has hollow stems and fennel has a more distinct anise flavor. What is called Indian dill was formerly classified as a separate species, but is now regarded as a variety. Indian dill tends to be taller and the seeds have a more pungent and bitter flavour.

Dill has special associations with the Nordic countries, Poland and Russia, where both seeds and leaves are used abundantly. The Nordic connection is apparent in the name itself, which comes from the Old Norse word *dilla* meaning 'to sooth or lull'. This name reflects the traditional use of dill both as a stomach soother as well as an insomnia reliever. This may also account for its use for many years as an ingredient of gripe water, a remedy for colic in infants. The custom of chewing dill seeds in church or in meetings may well account for its nickname 'meeting house' as the seeds were chewed to alleviate the boredom of long dry sermons, as well as to appease hunger, or to quiet rumbling stomachs!

Dill was a highly prized herb – once it was taxed. One such case is that of Edward I of England, who didn't have enough money to repair London Bridge, imposed a tax on dill and other spices that ships brought into the harbor to help raise the needed fund.

Dill was a favorite herb of magicians and sorcerers who used it to help cast their spells. An ancient folk belief was that branches of dill hung above the door would protect a home from witchcraft.

'Here holy Vervain, and here Dill'

'Gainst witchcraft much availing'

A bride who did not want her husband to be in charge of the marriage could secretly bring mustard and dill seeds to her wedding and repeat the phrase 'I have you, mustard and dill, Husband, when I speak, you stay still'. Folklore recommended boiling dill in wine and then smelling the fumes as a cure for hiccoughs.

Both dill leaves - sometimes referred to in cooking as 'dill weed' - and seeds make good seasoning for fish, chicken, lamb, stews, sauces, salad dressings, cream soups, sour cream, eggs and breads. Chopped dill is the main flavouring in gravlax. The chopped fresh flowers are also edible and make a nice addition to salads, savory bread or muffins. The seeds are often used in pickles, although in the Middle Ages, the whole flower head was harvested for pickling. Dill seed oil is used in proprietary medicines, soaps, and moisturizing creams, detergents and for flavouring in the food industry.

To harvest the seeds, cut the stalk when the seeds begin to turn golden brown. Hang upside down in a brown bag in a warm and dry place. The seeds will fall to the bottom of the bag. Gently dry them before storing. Successful cultivation of dills requires warm to hot summers with high sunshine levels and well-drained, good garden soil. Propagate by seeds sown in spring, or by allowing plants to self-sow in autumn.

Those Brits and Aussies!

Be careful when you call someone a 'dill', a 'dill weed' or a 'dill brain', that's British, Australian slang for a moron or an idiot. On the other hand, in America and Canada, there's nothing wrong with calling a person a 'dilly', that's slang for a person or something remarkable! But don't call anyone a 'dilly' in Britain - dilly is British slang for a phallus, and dilly weed is slang for pubic hair!