



Dill (*Anethum graveolens*)



Family

Dill belongs to the Umbelliferae family.

Habitat

A native of the Mediterranean countries and Southern Russia.

Description

Dill is an aromatic, upright annual with feathery, blue-green leaves. By mid-summer it has produced flattened umbels of tiny yellow flowers about 10cm across on tall, hollow, ridged stems. At first it is easy to mistake it for Fennel, but although they have similarly shaped leaves those of Fennel are a yellow-green and Fennel has a pungent aniseed scent. *Anethum graveolens* is the smaller variety of Dill and is also known as Dill Bouquet. It is sometimes called Dill Weed.

Constituents

Dill is very rich in minerals, Vitamin C, and flavonoids. The seeds comprise of so much calcium that 1 tablespoon contains 100 milligrams; more than a third of a cup of milk. The essential oil, of which the seeds contain up to 4 per cent, has stimulant, carminative and stomachic properties, and promotes lactation.

Propagation

Dill is an annual which grows to about 90cms in height. It is best sown where it is to flower in late spring and at in monthly intervals after that and the plants thinned to approximately 20cms apart. Grow apart from Fennel otherwise Dill's flavour becomes less intense. Dill is spindly and appreciates some support with twiggy sticks when small. A sheltered spot is best as the hollow stalks are top heavy once it flowers. It likes to grow in the sun. Work the soil until fine and water it. Place the seeds on the soil, press in firmly and only just cover them. Water well during the germination period of one to two weeks. The plants mature in about six weeks so small sowings at fortnightly intervals throughout the summer are recommended to produce a continuous supply of fresh leaves. Dill likes a lime soil and some fertilisation once a month; without the latter it begins to turn yellow. Keep well watered and weeded.

It is a helpful plant to have in the garden since it attracts beneficial insects whose larvae feed on aphids making it a good companion for roses. To harvest dill just snip what you need with scissors, leaving the rest of the plant to keep growing.

The seeds should ripen on the plant. If wishing to re-sow dill seed it should be done within 3 years for good germinating results.

History

Dill was very well known to Dioscorides. Pliny and Virgil have also written about it. It has an ancient reputation as a soothing medicine and as a condiment to help digestion. The name Dill is derived from the Old Norse word 'dylla' (to lull, soothe).

Charlemagne, in the 8th century, knew of the curative properties of dill seed. He ordered crystal vials of it to be placed on his banquet tables to stop the hiccup of guests who ate and drank too much.

Culpeper's Complete Herbal tells us that the decoction of dill, be it herb or seed (only if you boil the seed you must bruise it) in white wine, being drunk, is a gallant expeller of wind.

Medicinal Uses

Dill water has been used as a remedy for indigestion and wind in adults as well as children and is both safe and effective. It encourages sleep if taken at bedtime, both the leaves and seeds containing a mild sedative. Soak 1 teaspoon of seeds in a cup of boiling water for 5 or 10 minutes and give 1 tablespoon of this to adults or 1 teaspoon of it to children.

For the relief of hiccups make up a tea as above but steep it for just half a minute. Drink unsweetened in small sips.

Culinary uses

The fine leaves, raw, are excellent chopped over fish, especially smoked salmon and gravalax (marinated salmon) and also over new potatoes or added at the last minute to fish or meat soup. In any hot dish it is best to add it just before serving as it otherwise loses its flavour in the heat. For maximum flavour use the leaves before the flowers appear. Small sprigs wrapped in foil and sealed well will keep for several weeks in the freezer. Alternatively, freeze in ice cubes. The Scandinavians use the seeds together with seedheads to pickle their small cucumbers: in America these are known as dill pickles.

Administration to Animals

Goats' milk production can apparently be increased by the use of essential oil of Dill. The following recipe is given by Valerie Ann Worwood in her book *The Fragrant Pharmacy*:¹

Dilute 7 drops of essential oil of Fennel and 8 drops of essential oil of Dill in 100 ml of boiling water and add just One Teaspoon of this to the goats' feed.

References

1 - A Bantam Book 0 553 40397 4

Researched by Sharon Fredriksson of the Herb Federation of New Zealand for Herb Awareness Week 2010
Wellington, October 2009.