

Caraway

MEDICINAL: Caraway aids digestion, can help promote menses, can increase a mother's milk, and is good to add to cough remedies as an expectorant.

MAGICKAL: Carry Caraway in an amulet for protection. Carrying caraway seeds promotes the memory. It can also guard against theft. It is said to promote lust when baked into breads, cookies, or cakes.

GROWING: Caraway can be found in meadows, woods, and rocky areas. It prefers a rich soil.

Native to Europe, Asia, and Africa, it also grows wild here in North America. It is a biennial that reaches 1 1/2 - 2 feet high.

Caraway (*Carum carvi*): Mercury, Air. Used in love charms to attract a lover.

Also known as

Carum carvi, Anis des Vosges, *Apium carvi*, *Carvi Fructus*, Cumin des Pres, Haravi, Krishan Jeeraka, Krishnajiraka, Kummel, Kummich, Roman Cumin, *Semen Cumini Pratensis*, Semences de Carvi, Wiesen-Feldkummel, Wild Cumin.

Introduction

The warming and aromatic "seeds" of the caraway plant are used to give a distinctive flavor to rye bread, cabbage, soups, pickles, teas, liqueurs, and spirits. Caraway is said to have been used in Europe longer than any other condiment. A more aromatic and bitter alternative to cumin, caraway is key to Indian, Dutch, German, Russian, and Scandinavian cooking. Although it has an affinity to cooked cabbage and coleslaw, a little ground caraway added at the end of cooking (to avoid bitterness) will add a pleasant and unexpected taste to both sweets and savories.

Constituents

Caraway's distinct aroma is due to carvones and carveols. The "seed" also contains oil, carbohydrate, antioxidant flavonoids, and protein.

Parts Used

Each "seed" is half of a caraway fruit. The dried fruits are used whole or ground in cooking and herbal medicine.

Typical Preparations

Usually as a tea, but also in infusions, tinctures, encapsulations and as a seasoning.

Summary

Caraway promotes gastric secretion and stimulates appetite. It breaks down spasms in the gastrointestinal tract to prevent flatulence, but it is also used to treat menstrual cramps and gallbladder spasms. The German E commission reports that caraway seeds are an antimicrobial, and can relieve the feeling of bloating or fullness associated with indigestion and stomach complaints. Caraway oil is strongly fungicidal, having a stronger anti-fungal and anti-yeast activity than the prescription medication Nystatin. Caraway seed oil is used as a flavoring agent in pharmaceuticals, a fragrance in cosmetics and body care products, and is used in all major categories of food, from meat to candy to condiments.

Precautions

To keep the essential oils at maximum potency, store in a glass container protected from light, moisture, and heat.

Botanical: *Carum Carvi* (LINN.)

Family: N.O. Umbelliferae

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---**Synonym**---Caraway Seed.

---**Part Used**---Fruit.

---**Habitat**---The plant is distributed throughout the northern and central parts of Europe and Asia, though where it occurs in this country it is only considered a naturalized species, having apparently escaped from cultivation.

Caraway is another member of the group of aromatic, umbelliferous plants characterized by carminative properties, like Anise, Cumin, Dill and Fennel. It is grown, however, less for the medicinal properties of the fruits, or so-called 'seeds,' than for their use as a flavouring in cookery, confectionery and liqueurs .

---**Description**---It is a biennial, with smooth, furrowed stems growing 1 1/2 to 2 feet high, bearing finely cut leaves, and umbels of white flowers which blossom in June. The fruits which are popularly and incorrectly called seeds - and which correspond in general character to those of the other plants of this large family, are laterally compressed, somewhat horny and translucent, slightly curved, and marked with five distinct, pale ridges. They evolve a pleasant, aromatic odour when bruised, and have an agreeable taste.

The leaves possess similar properties and afford an oil identical with that of the fruit. The tender leaves in spring have been boiled in soup, to give it an aromatic flavour.

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---**History**---The roots are thick and tapering, like a parsnip, though much smaller and are edible. Parkinson declared them, when young, to be superior in flavour to Parsnips. Mixed with milk and made into bread, they are said to have formed the 'Chara' of Julius Ceasar, eaten by the soldiers of Valerius.

Caraway was well known in classic days, and it is believed that its use originated with the ancient Arabs, who called the 'seeds' *Karawya*, a name they still bear in the East, and clearly the origin of our word Caraway and the Latin name *Carvi*, although Pliny would have us believe that the name Carvi was derived from Caria, in Asia Minor, where according to him the plant was originally found. In old Spanish the name occurs as *Alcaravea*.

Caraway is frequently mentioned by the old writers. Dioscorides advised the oil to be taken by pale-faced girls. In the Middle Ages and in Shakespeare's times it was very popular.

'The seed,' says Parkinson, 'is much used to be put among baked fruit, or into bread, cakes, etc., to give them a relish. It is also made into comfites and taken for cold or wind in the body, which also are served to the table with fruit.'

In *Henry IV*, Squire Shallow invites Falstaff to 'a pippin and a dish of caraways.' The custom of serving roast apples with a little saucerful of Caraway is still kept up at Trinity College, Cambridge, and at some of the old-fashioned London Livery Dinners, just as in Shakespeare's days - and in Scotland to this day a saucerful is put down at tea to dip the buttered side of bread into and called 'salt water jelly.'

The scattering of the seed over cakes has long been practised, and Caraway-seed cake was formerly a standing institution at the feasts given by farmers to their labourers at the end of the wheat-sowing. The little Caraway comfites consist of the seeds encrusted with white sugar. In Germany, the peasants flavour their cheese, cabbage, soups, and household bread with Caraway, and in Norway and Sweden, polenta-like, black, Caraway bread is largely eaten in country districts.

The oil extracted from the fruits is used as an ingredient of alcoholic liquors: both the Russians and the Germans make from Caraway a liqueur, 'Kummel,' and Caraway enters into the composition of *l'huile de Venus* and other cordials.

A curious superstition was held in olden times about the Caraway. It was deemed to confer the gift of retention, preventing the theft of any object which contained it, and holding the thief in custody within the invaded house. In like manner it was thought to keep lovers from proving fickle (forming an ingredient of love potions), and also to prevent fowls and pigeons from straying. It is an undoubted fact that tame pigeons, who are particularly fond of the seeds, will never stray if they are given a piece of baked Caraway dough in their cote.

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---**Cultivation**---Preparation for Market--Caraway does best when the seeds are sown in the autumn, as soon as ripe, though they may be sown in March. Sow in drills, 1 foot apart, the plants when strong enough, being thinned out to about 8 inches in the rows. The ground will require an occasional hoeing to keep it clean and assist the growth of the plants. From an autumn-sown crop, seeds will be produced in the following summer, ripening about August.

When the fruit ripens, the plant is cut and the Caraways are separated by threshing. They can be dried either on trays in the sun, or by very

gentle heat over a stove, shaking occasionally.

There are several varieties, the English, the Dutch and the German (obtained from plants extensively cultivated in Moravia and Prussia), and other varieties imported from Norway, Finland, Russia and the Morocco ports.

---Habitat---One marked peculiarity about Caraway is that it is indigenous to all parts of Europe, Siberia, Turkey in Asia, Persia, India and North Africa, and yet it is cultivated only in a few comparatively restricted areas. It grows wild in many parts of Canada and the United States, but is nowhere grown there as a field or garden crop. Its cultivation is restricted to relatively small areas in England, Holland, Germany, Finland, Russia, Norway and Morocco, where it constitutes one of the chief agricultural industries within its narrow confines. It has so far received comparatively little attention in England, where it is grown only in Essex, Kent and Suffolk, upon old grassland broken up for the purpose. Holland cultivates the main crop, producing and exporting far larger quantities than any other country. It is cultivated most extensively there in the provinces of Groningen and North Holland, in which more than half the acreage is found. In the whole country about 20,000 acres are devoted to this crop, each acre yielding about 1,000 lb., whereas while Caraway is grown commercially throughout Germany, Austria, France and parts of Spain, the character and amounts produced are very variable, and the yield per acre varies only from 400 to 700 lb., and these countries do not produce much more than they require for home consumption. Morocco produces a grade of Caraway that comes regularly into the English and American markets, but is somewhat inferior in quality. Dutch Caraway is preferred among consumers in the United States, and the bulk used there comes from Holland.

During the last year or two there has been a scarcity of Caraway, owing partly to the fact that the extensive area of land in Holland usually employed for the cultivation of the plant was devastated by floods towards the close of 1915. Much Dill seed is now being sold in its place. Quite lately, a small grower reported that she had netted L. 5 (pounds sterling) from growing Caraway on a corner of what otherwise would have been waste ground.

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---Constituents---The seeds contain from 4 to 7 per cent of volatile oil, according to the variety of Caraway fruit from which obtained that distilled from home-grown fruits being considered the best. Caraway grown in more northerly latitudes is richer in essential oil than that grown in southern regions, and if grown in full sun a greater percentage and a richer oil is obtained.

The oil is distilled chiefly from Dutch, Norwegian and Russian fruits. The Dutch are small and dark brown in colour. English fruits, of which only a small quantity is produced, are of a brighter tint.

The chief constituent of the oil is a hydrocarbon termed Carvene, also found in oils of Dill and Cumin, and an oxygenated oil Carvol, a mobile liquid (isomeric with the menthol of Spearmint).

From 6 lb. of the unbruised seeds, 4 oz. of the pure essential oil can be expressed.

The exhausted seed, after the distillation of the oil, contains a high percentage of protein and fat, and is used as a cattle food.

---Medicinal Action and Uses---Both fruit and oil possess aromatic, stimulant and carminative properties. Caraway was widely employed at one time as a carminative cordial, and was recommended in dyspepsia and symptoms attending hysteria and other disorders. It possesses some tonic property and forms a pleasant stomachic. Its former extensive employment in medicine has much decreased in recent years, and the oil and fruit are now principally employed as adjuncts to other medicines as corrective or flavouring agents, combined with purgatives. For flatulent indigestion, however, from 1 to 4 drops of the essential oil of Caraway given on a lump of sugar, or in a teaspoonful of water, will be found efficacious. Distilled Caraway water is considered a useful remedy in the flatulent colic of infants, and is an excellent vehicle for children's medicine. When sweetened, its flavour is agreeable.

One ounce of the bruised seeds infused for 6 hours in a pint of cold water makes a good Caraway julep for infants, from 1 to 3 teaspoonsful being given for a dose.

The bruised seeds, pounded with the crumb of a hot new loaf and a little spirit to moisten, was an old-fashioned remedy for bad earache. The powder of the seeds, made into a poultice, will also take away bruises.