

Dill Weed Profile

Also known as

Anethum graveolens, American Dill, Anethum Sowa, Anethi Herba, Dill Herb, Dill Oil, Dill Weed, Dillweed, Dilly, European Dill, Madhura, Peucedanum Graveolens, Satahva, Sotapa, Sowa.

Introduction

The Vikings cultivated a plant they called "dilla," or "soothing," as a remedy for colic in babies. The easy-to-grow dill weed has become an essential ingredient in cuisines around the world. The term "dill weed" refers to the green leaves (and sometimes stems) of the plant. "Dill seed" actually isn't seed but the flat, oval, dark brown whole fruits of the herb. Dill weed and dill seed have different chemical compositions, different uses in cooking, and different applications in herbal healing. If you want to grow dill in your garden, plan for success. The mature plant produces thousands of seeds, most dill seeds germinate, and the plant can invade other growing beds. Dill likes a moist, well-drained soil in full sun, although it grows on most kinds of soils. Stress on the plant by heat or drought improves its flavor. If you let dill come up on its own, it will mature and go to seed before you have cucumbers. If you want to use dill in pickling, plant dill and cucumbers at the same time.

Constituents

Dill weed and dill seed have different components in their essential oil. The distinctive aroma of dill weed is due to carvone (30 to 40%), limonene (30 to 40%), phellandrene (10 to 20%) and other monoterpenes. Dill weed oil has a distinctive dill ether that helps in its scientific identification.

Parts Used

The leaf, dried, cut, and sifted, or used fresh.

Typical Preparations

Added to cooking, can be taken as a tea or in capsule form.

Summary

Dill both settles the stomach and is mildly antibacterial. The August 2005 edition of the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry confirmed the usefulness of dill in stopping growth of various bacteria, yeast, and molds.

Precautions

If you are using an Indian cookbook, try making the dish with half as much dill as the recipe calls for, unless the cookbook was written specifically for Western readers. The dill sold in India is a different

species that is much less pungent than the dill sold in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe.

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Constituents

Dill seed and dill weed have different components in their essential oil. The distinctive aroma of dill seed is due to carvone (up to 60%) and limonene (up to 40%). Dill seed does not contain the phellandrene and other monoterpenes found in the leaf. Apiole is found in Indian dill seed but not in the species of the herb used in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.

Parts Used

The "seeds" or fruit of the plant, used whole.

Typical Preparations

Added to cooking or pickling. May be taken as a capsule or extract.

Summary

Dill both settles the stomach and is mildly antibacterial. The August 2005 edition of the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry confirmed the usefulness of dill seed and weed in stopping growth of various bacteria, yeast, and molds.

Precautions

If you are using an Indian cookbook, try making the dish with half as much dill as the recipe calls for, unless the cookbook was written specifically for Western readers. The dill sold in India is a different species that is much less pungent than the dill sold in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe.

Dill

Botanical: *Peucedanum graveolens* (BENTH.)

Family: N.O. Compositae

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---**Synonyms**---Anethum graveolus. Fructus Anethi.

---**Part Used**---Dried ripe fruit.

Dill is a hardy annual, a native of the Mediterranean region and Southern Russia. It grows wild among the corn in Spain and Portugal and upon the coast of Italy, but rarely occurs as a cornfield weed in Northern Europe.

The plant is referred to in St. Matthew XXiii., 23, though the original Greek name *Anethon*, was erroneously rendered *Anise* by English translators, from Wicklif (1380) downwards.

Dill is commonly regarded as the Anethon of Dioscorides. It was well known in Pliny's days and is often mentioned by writers in the Middle Ages. As a drug it has been in use from very early times. It occurs in the tenth-century vocabulary of Alfric, Archbishop of Canterbury.

The name is derived, according to Prior's *Popular Names of English Plants*, from the old Norse word, *dilla* (to lull), in allusion to the carminative properties of the drug.

Lyte (*Dodoens*, 1578) says Dill was sown in all gardens amongst worts and pot-herbs.

In the Middle Ages, Dill was also one of the herbs used by magicians in their spells, and charms against witchcraft.

In Drayton's *Nymphidia* are the lines:

'Therewith her Vervain and her Dill,
That hindereth Witches of their Will.'

Culpepper tells us that:

'Mercury has the dominion of this plant, and therefore to be sure it strengthens the brain.... It stays the hiccough, being boiled in wine, and but smelled unto being tied in a cloth. The seed is of more use than the leaves, and more effectual to digest raw and vicious humours, and is used in medicines that serve to expel wind, and the pains proceeding therefrom....'

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---Description---The plant grows ordinarily from 2 to 2 1/2 feet high and is very like fennel, though smaller, having the same feathery leaves, which stand on sheathing foot-stalks, with linear and pointed leaflets. Unlike fennel, however, it has seldom more than one stalk and its long, spindle-shaped root is only annual. It is of very upright growth, its stems smooth, shiny and hollow, and in midsummer bearing flat terminal umbels with numerous yellow flowers, whose small petals are rolled inwards. The flat fruits, the so-called seeds, are produced in great quantities. They are very pungent and bitter in taste and very light, an ounce containing over 25,000 seeds. Their germinating capacity lasts for three years. The whole plant is aromatic.

The plant was placed by Linnaeus in a separate genus, *Anethum*, whence the name *Fructus Anethi*, by which Dill fruit goes in medicine. It is now included in the genus *Peucedanum*.

---Cultivation---This annual is of very easy culture. When grown on a large scale for the sake of its fruits, it may be sown in drills 10 inches apart, in March or April, 10 lb. of the seed being drilled to the acre, and thinned out to leave 8 to 10 inches room each way. Sometimes the seed is sown in autumn as soon as ripe, but it is not so advisable as spring sowing. Careful attention must be given to the destruction of weeds. The crop is considered somewhat exhaustive of soil fertility.

---Harvesting---Mowing starts as the lower seeds begin, the others ripening on the straw. In dry periods, cutting is best done in early morning or late evening, care being taken to handle with the least possible shaking to prevent loss. The loose sheaves are built into stacks of about twenty sheaves, tied together. In hot weather, threshing may be done in the field, spreading the sheaves on a large canvas sheet and beating out. The average yield is about 7 cwt. of Dill fruits per acre.

The seeds are finally dried by spreading out on trays in the sun, or for a short time over the moderate heat of a stove, shaking occasionally.

Dill fruits are oval, compressed, winged about one-tenth inch wide, with three longitudinal ridges on the back and three dark lines or oil cells (*vittae*) between them and two on the flat surface. The taste of the fruits somewhat resembles caraway. The seeds are smaller, flatter and lighter than caraway and have a pleasant aromatic odour. They contain a volatile oil (obtained by distillation) on which the action of the fruit depends. The bruised seeds impart their virtues to alcohol and to boiling water.

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---Constituents---Oil of Dill is of a pale yellow colour, darkening on keeping, with the odour of the fruit and a hot, acrid taste. Its specific gravity varies between 0.895 and 0.915. The fruit yields about

3.5 per cent of the oil, which is a mixture of a paraffin hydrocarbon and 40 to 60 per cent of d-carvone, with d-limonene. Phellandrine is present in the English and Spanish oils, but not to any appreciable extent in the German oil.

In spite of the difference in odour between Dill and Caraway oils, the composition of the two is almost identical, both consisting nearly entirely of limonene and carvone. Dill oil, however, contains less carvone than caraway oil.

English-distilled oils usually have the highest specific gravity, from 0.910 to 0.916, and are consequently held in the highest esteem.

---Uses---As a sweet herb, Dill is not much used in this country. When employed, it is for flavouring soups, sauces, etc., for which purpose the young leaves only are required. The leaves added to fish, or mixed with pickled cucumbers give them a spicy taste.

Dill vinegar, however, forms a popular household condiment. It is made by soaking the seeds in vinegar for a few days before using.

The French use Dill seeds for flavouring cakes and pastry, as well as for flavouring sauces.

Perhaps the chief culinary use of Dill seeds is in pickling cucumbers: they are employed in this way chiefly in Germany where pickled cucumbers are largely eaten.

---Medicinal Action and Uses---Like the other umbelliferous fruits and volatile oils, both Dill fruit and oil of Dill possess stimulant, aromatic, carminative and stomachic properties, making them of considerable medicinal value.

Oil of Dill is used in mixtures, or administered in doses of 5 drops on sugar, but its most common use is in the preparation of Dill Water, which is a common domestic remedy for the flatulence of infants, and is a useful vehicle for children's medicine generally.

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---Preparations---Dill water, 1 to 8 drachms. Oil, 1 to 5 drops.

Oil of Dill is also employed for perfuming soaps.

The British Pharmacopoeia directs that only the fruits from English-grown plants shall be employed pharmaceutically, and it is grown in East Anglia for that purpose. The Dill fruits of commerce are imported from central and southern Europe, the plant being largely cultivated in Germany and Roumania.

Considerable quantities of Dill fruit are imported from India and Japan - they are the fruits of a species of *Peucedanum* that has been considered by some botanists entitled to rank as a distinct species, *P. Sowa* (Kurz), but is included by others in the species, *P. graveolens*. Indian dill is widely grown in the Indies under the name of 'Soyah,' its fruit and leaves being used for flavouring pickles. Its fruits are narrower and more convex than European dill, with paler, more distinct ridges and narrower wings.

The oils from both Japanese and Indian dill differ from European dill oil, in having a higher specific gravity (0.948 to 0.968), which is ascribed to the presence of dill apiol, and in containing much less carvone than the European oil. It should not be substituted for the official oil.

African dill oil is produced from plants grown from English imported seed. The fruits are slightly larger than the English fruits and a little paler in colour, their odour closely resembling the English. The yield of oil is slightly larger than that of English fruits, and it is considered that if the fruits can be produced

in Cape Colony, they should form a most useful source of supply.

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SOME OLD-FASHIONED FENNEL AND DILL RECIPES

---A Sallet of Fennel---

'Take young Fennel, about a span long in the spring, tye it up in bunches as you do Sparragrass; when your Skillet boyle, put in enough to make a dish; when it is boyled and drained, dish it up as you do Sparragrass, pour on butter and vinegar and send it up.' (From *The Whole Body of Cookery Dissected*, 1675, by William Tabisha.)

---Fennel and Gooseberry Sauce---

'Brown some butter in a saucepan with apinch of flour, then put in a few cives shred small, add a little Irish broth to moisten it, season with salt and pepper; make these boil, then put in two or three sprigs of Fennel and some Gooseberries. Let all simmer together till the Gooseberries are soft and then put in some Cullis.' (From *Receipt Book* of Henry Howard, Cook to the Duke of Ormond, 1710.)

---Dill and Collyflower Pickle---

'Boil the Collyflowers till they fall inpieces; then with some of the stalk and worst of the flower boil it in a part of the liquer till pretty strong. Then being taken off strain it- and when settled, clean it from the bottom. Then with Dill, gross pepper, a pretty quantity of salt, when cold add as much vinegar as will make it sharp and pour all upon the Collyflower.' (From *Acetaria*, a book about Sallets, 1680, by John Evelyn.)

---To Pickle Cucumbers in Dill---

'Gather the tops of the ripest dill and cover the bottom of the vessel, and lay a layer of Cucumbers and another of Dill till you have filled the vessel within a handful of the top. Then take as much water as you think will fill the vessel and mix it with salt and a quarter of a pound of allom to a gallon of water and poure it on them and press them down with a stone on them and keep them covered close. For that use I think the water will be best boyl'd and cold, which will keep longer sweet, or if you like not this pickle, doe it with water, salt and white wine vinegar, or (if you please) pour the water and salt on them scalding hot which will make them ready to use the sooner.' (From *Receipt Book* of Joseph Cooper, Cook to Charles I, 1640.)