



# Fennel Seed Facts

## *FOENICULUM VULGARE*

- Fennel is native to southern Europe, though has naturalized in northern Europe, Australia and North America.
- Fennel is cultivated around the world. The United States imports most of the fennel seed sold commercially from Egypt.
- The seeds, leaves, flowers, pollen, stalk and bulb of the fennel plant are all edible.
- Fennel is part of the Umbelliferae family, like parsley, carrots and dill.
- The bulb is high in phytonutrients and is a good source of vitamin C, folate, potassium and fiber.
- The seeds and leaves have an anise-like flavor, though roasting the seeds removes some of the sweetness yielding a more savory flavor.
- The seeds and leaves of common fennel or *Foeniculum vulgare* are used in salads, fish, baked goods and to make tea. The seeds are commonly used in sausage, stuffing, added to pickles and sauerkraut. The seeds are an ingredient in Chinese Five Spice powder.
- Bronze fennel which is the cultivar 'Rubrum' is also edible and makes an especially attractive garnish.
- *Foeniculum vulgare* var. *azoricum* or Florence Fennel, has a swollen base that is used in salads or is cooked.
- Essential oil from the seeds is added to perfumes, soaps, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics.
- Fennel was used by the ancient Egyptians as a food and medicine, and was considered a snake bite remedy in ancient China.
- During the Middle Ages it was hung over doorways to drive away evil spirits.
- Fennel is also associated with the origin of the marathon. Ancient Athenian Pheidippides carried a fennel stalk on his 150 mile, 2 day run to Sparta to gather soldiers for the battle of Marathon with Persia in 490 B.C. The battle itself was also reportedly waged on a field of fennel.
- Fennel is an excellent plant for a butterfly garden. It is a host plant for swallowtail butterfly larva, who can feed on the leaves without overtaking and destroying the plant.

## GROWING TIPS

- Fennel is a perennial in zones 4-10 and readily self-sows where it is grown as an annual.
- Fennel grows to 5-7' in height. Florence Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare* var. *azoricum*) grows to 3' tall and prefers cool weather.
- Due to its tap root, fennel does not transplant well.
- To grow from seed, soaking the seed for 2 days improves germination.
- The bronze variety, *F. vulgare* 'Purpureum' is an attractive alternative to the dark green of the straight species and is just as flavorful.
- Fennel does well in full sun and well-drained soil.
- To avoid cross-pollination, don't plant dill and fennel near each other.
- Harvest the seeds as they mature but before they begin to drop by placing cut flower heads into a paper bag. The seeds will drop and be collected in the bag as they dry.