

Did You Know?



Cumin, *Cuminum cyminum*

- The cumin plant produces small white or pink flowers on umbels, which then produce the small seeds with longitudinal ridges.
- The aromatic and flavorful seeds (which are technically the fruits) of the cumin plant have been cultivated since around 2200-1400 B.C.E.
- Evidence of cumin use has been discovered in ancient Egypt and Syria. And known to be significant spice for the Minoans in ancient Crete. It is known to have been used as both a seasoning and a preserving spice in mummification.
- Many cultures use cumin to flavor their food, including those in Europe, North Africa, Middle East, South Asia and Mexico.
- Ancient Greeks and Romans had containers of cumin on their tables and used it in place of black pepper. They also made a paste of it to spread on bread, much like peanut butter.
- During the Middle Ages, Europeans believed cumin would keep lovers faithful. Cumin cakes were given by girls before their lovers left for a long journey to both keep them faithful and ensure their safe return.
- Cumin's popularity in Europe was replaced by caraway.
- Cumin was introduced to the Americas by the Spanish and Portuguese settlers. Now it is used to flavor many diverse dishes such as curries, meats, pickles, cheeses, sausages, soups, chilies, and stews around the world.
- The essential oil of cumin has both antibacterial and antioxidant properties. Cumin has many traditional medicinal uses ranging from reducing inflammation, treating gastrointestinal issues to skin sores.
- Today, research is being conducted on traditional uses including antibacterial effects, cancer prevention, cholesterol and diabetes management, digestion and weight control.
- Cumin requires 120 frost free days to produce seeds for harvest.
- India produces about 70% of the world's cumin.
- The dark seeded form is called black cumin, *Cuminum nigrum* which is not to be confused with the Middle Eastern black cumin which is an entirely different plant, *Nigella sativa*.

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