

## An Herb Society of America Fact Sheet

# Anise

### *Pimpinella anisum* (anise, aniseed)

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*Pimpinella anisum* is an annual belonging to the family Apiaceae; it is related to other plants prized for their aromatic fruits, commonly called seeds, such as dill, cumin, caraway and fennel. Anise is believed to be Asian in origin but is currently found in Central and Southern Europe, Egypt, Russia, Cyprus, Syria and North America. Most commercial seed is imported from Turkey, followed by Spain and China.

#### Description

The plant may be from 18 inches to 4 feet in height under cultivation (average 2 feet), with finely divided feather-like leaflets of bright green; its genus name, *Pimpinella* (from the Latin *dipinella*), refers to the twice-pinnate form of the leaves, which are kidney-shaped when young. It bears white flowers in umbels. Seeds are greyish-green when ripe and are ribbed. All of the plant tastes strongly of anise.

#### Culture

Anise is a half-hardy annual that prefers light, rich, well-drained soil. Seed is sown in a warm, sunny location in spring; like many members of the family Apiaceae, anise does not transplant well. Seed requires a temperature of 70°F to germinate. Thin to allow 6-12 inches between plants. Plant stems are often weak, but a line of string along each side of the row will prevent plants from flopping over. Firming soil at the base can also help. Plants may flower as early as 6 weeks after sowing, but ripening of the seeds may take up to 4 months of growth, and requires summer heat. Seeds of homegrown anise should be dried 3 or 4 days in sunlight, then finished off in a 100-degree oven to kill off any insect life.

#### Uses

Anise has been used as a medicinal, culinary and a fragrance plant since ancient times. The Egyptians were reportedly the first to cultivate anise for use as a spice, and the Romans ate anise seed cakes at the conclusion of feasts to aid digestion.

Today aniseed is used to flavor a variety of dishes, from soups, salads and baked goods to pepperoni, bologna and other meats. It can be added to curries, baked apples and cooked vegetables, including carrots, cabbage and beets. A tea can be made from the seeds and leaves. Anise seeds are GRAS (Generally Recognized as Safe) at 2-5000 ppm and the essential oil is GRAS at 7-3200 ppm.

Commercially, anise oil is used to flavor cough syrups, chewing gum, ice cream, toothpaste, mouse bait and licorice-flavored candy, and is a primary ingredient in many alcoholic beverages and liqueurs, including anisette, ouzo and muscatel wine. Oil is also added to perfumes, tobacco, soaps and skin creams.

The essential oil is reportedly antibacterial, antiviral, insecticidal, expectorant, antispasmodic, and has estrogenic effects. Many of these properties are due to the presence of anethole in the essential oil. Anise also has a long-standing folk reputation as an aphrodisiac. It is approved by the German Commission E to treat dyspeptic complaints and catarrh of the respiratory tract. Although anise has traditionally been used to encourage lactation, some sources don't recommend this use due to possible toxicity to infants. Anise may also cause contact dermatitis or allergic reactions in some individuals. (continued ...)



*Pimpinella anisum* (anise)

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## Other plants called anise

Star anise is the fruit of a tree common to China and Japan, *Illicium verum*. It is star-shaped, each segment of the star bearing a shiny seed. The fruit has a very similar taste and aroma to that of *Pimpinella anisum*. *Foeniculum vulgare*, Florence fennel or finocchio (the vegetable form of fennel) is sometimes confusingly called anise in grocery stores because of the resemblance in taste. *P. anisum*, should not be confused with *Illicium anisatum* (Japanese or Chinese anise) whose seeds are toxic. Anise also resembles other poisonous members of the family Apiaceae.

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