

# DILL - HERB OF THE YEAR 2010

In 1995 the International Herb Association decided to pick an Herb of the Year for each of the next 15 years. The purpose of designating an herb of the year was to highlight that herb for study, use and appreciate throughout the year.

This year the Herb of the Year is Dill, *Anethum graveolens*.

For those of you just getting started growing, using and appreciating herbs, here's some basic information on Dill.

- Botanical Name: **Anethum graveolens**
- Family: Apiaceae- **related to carrots and parsley**
- Growth: **Annual, sometimes Biennial**
- Light: **Full Sun**
- Soil: **Well draining, average garden soil**
- Water: **Water regularly, but do not overwater, somewhat drought tolerant**
- Pests: **Aphids**
- Diseases: **Root Rot**
- Height: **up to 3', Fernleaf cultivar to 18"**
- Propagation: **Seed**
- Parts Used: **Leaf, Flower and Seed**

Dill weed is best harvested before the plant is fully mature and before the flower buds have opened. Snip the leaves any time for culinary use as the plant grows. Some plants should be constantly snipped for their leaves and some left to flower and produce seeds, or succession plantings may be made every 2 weeks. The cultivar 'Fernleaf,' growing only to 18 inches, produces more foliage and is slower to bolt. 'Bouquet' bears compact, prolific seed heads and is considered best for pickling. Dill will self-sow readily. Some gardeners allow a rather crowded patch of dill to grow so that the plants hold one another erect.

Dill is thought to be native to Western Asia and the Mediterranean. The earliest known record of Dill use is in Ancient Egypt some 5000 years ago when Dill is referred to as "soothing medicine". Dill has been used for centuries throughout the world for both culinary and medicinal purposes.

## CULINARY USES OF DILL

Most people think of pickles if asked what Dill is used for. And, commercially, that is the most common use for Dill. There are many other ways to use Dill, however, in the cuisines of many nations. In Scandinavia, Dill is almost the national spice, being used in many fish dishes including Gravlax, a prepared salmon dish. In fact, our word "Dill" comes from the Norse word "Dilla" (to lull) due to the calmative properties of Dill.

The leafy part of Dill, sometimes called Dill Weed or Dillweed, is aromatic and tender. There are almost unlimited ways to use Dill in cooking. Fresh chopped Dillweed is used in egg salad, tuna salad, sprinkled on fish prior to baking or broiling and mixed into herb butters and spreads. It can be used as a component in herb vinegars and vinaigrettes. Using Dill in cold dishes such as tuna and egg salads can add flavor so salt use is reduced. Dill seed is used in breads and some desserts. It can be added to fermented vegetables such as sauerkraut in place of caraway. The seeds are also chewed as a breath freshener.

Dill seed has been known as "meeting seeds" because they were often chewed during long church services to stay awake, to keep children quiet and to quiet a rumbling stomach, much the same as fennel seed has been used.

## DILL IN THE GARDEN

Dill flowers are most often used in pickles, adding color and ornament to the pickle jar. Left on the plant, dill flowers are wonderful butterfly and beneficial insect attractors. Butterflies use Dill as a host plant, meaning they will lay their eggs on the plant so the larva can eat as soon as they hatch out. If you see colorful caterpillars on your dill, don't remove them because in time, you'll have more butterflies to grace your garden. Many people just plant extra dill for the critters. I hand pick baby caterpillars off the dill I have for sale in pots and transfer them to the plants in the garden!

## MEDICINAL USES FOR DILL

While dill is not a major player in most herbal medicine chests, it certainly has uses other than

simply culinary and ornamental. Dill's unique health benefits come from two types of healing components: monoterpenes, including carvone, limonene, and anethofuran; and flavonoids, including kaempferol and vicenin.

### **Protection Against Free Radicals and Carcinogens**

The monoterpene components of dill have been shown to activate the enzyme glutathione-S-transferase, which helps attach the anti-oxidant molecule glutathione to oxidized molecules that would otherwise do damage in the body. The activity of dill's volatile oils qualify it as a "chemoprotective" food (much like parsley) that can help neutralize particular types of carcinogens, such as the benzopyrenes that are part of cigarette smoke, charcoal grill smoke, and the smoke produced by trash incinerators.

### **An Anti-Bacterial Spice**

The total volatile oil portion of dill has also been studied for its ability to prevent bacterial overgrowth. In this respect, dill shares the stage with garlic, which has also been shown to have "bacteriostatic" or bacteria-regulating effects.

### **A Flavorful Way to Help Prevent Bone Loss**

In addition to its chemoprotective and bacteriostatic properties, dill is a very good source of calcium. Calcium is important for reducing the bone loss that occurs after menopause and in some conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis. Dill is a good source of dietary fiber and a good source of the minerals manganese, iron and magnesium.

### **Dill for Digestion**

Contemporary herbalists recommend chewing the seeds for bad breath and drinking dill tea both as a digestive aid and to stimulate milk production in nursing mothers. The herb helps relax the smooth muscles of the digestive tract. One study shows it's also an antifoaming agent, meaning it helps prevent the formation of intestinal gas bubbles.

Dill is an herb which is at home all over the world. It is easy to grow by sowing seeds in place in the garden and keeping the soil moist until they are germinated and have gained some size. Many sources say dill does not transplant well because it grows with a tap root, but if you seed it in pots and transplant it before it gets too big, there is not a problem. I recommend dill in the garden for you and for the butterflies.

You can find Dill Seed wherever herb seed is sold and at The Herb Cottage Seed Selection-Herbs: <http://theherbcottage.com/seeds1.html>

### **RESOURCES FOR THIS ARTICLE:**

<http://www.whfoods.com/genpage.php?tname=foodspice&dbid=71>

[http://www.uni-graz.at/~katzer/engl/Anet\\_gra.html](http://www.uni-graz.at/~katzer/engl/Anet_gra.html)

<http://pss.uvm.edu/pss123/herdill.html>

<http://herbsociety.org/documents/DillAnethumgraveolens.pdf>

<http://www.sallybernstein.com/food/columns/gilbert/dill.htm>