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Dill The Meeting House Herb

By Judi Singleton

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Dill The "Meeting House" Herb
(Anethum graveolens)

There is nothing like the flavor of fresh dill, and the best way to get really fresh dill is to grow it yourself. Fortunately, dill is an easy herb to grow, and once you discover the pleasures of growing your own, you'll never buy commercially prepared dill again. In this issue, you'll discover how to grow dill, and lots of uses for this refreshing herb. Some of the recipes in this issue may be familiar, but I bet you'll find a few new ones, too!

Dill or dill weed, is a native of Southern Europe and Western Asia.

Dill grows wild in the Mediterranean countries and has escaped from gardens in parts of North and South America. It was found among the names of herbs used by Egyptian doctors 5,000 years ago and the remains of the plant have been found in the ruins of Roman buildings in Britain.

It is mentioned in the Gospel of St. Matthew: It is suggested that

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herbs were of sufficient value to be used as a tax payment—oh if that were true today! : "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and dill and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law."

It was once an important medicinal herb for treating coughs and headaches, and an ingredient of ointments and for calming infants with whooping cough. Dill is said to come from the Anglo-Saxon dylle meaning to soothe or lull.

During the Middle Ages dill was prized as protection against witchcraft. While magicians used it in their spells, lesser mortals infused it in wine to enhance passion. Early settlers took dill to North America, where it came to be known as the "Meeting House Seed," because the children were given the seed to chew during long sermons to keep them from feeling hungry.

Dill is an annual with a height of about 2–5 feet. Tiny yellow-green flowers grow in flattened umbel clusters in the summer. The leaves are aromatic, feathery green. Dill weed is what most recipes ask for, dill leaf is the same thing.

In the Spring sow the seeds in succession for a good leaf crop. The seeds are easy to handle, being a good size. Dill does not like being transplanted, so choose the site carefully. Dill prefers well-drained, fertile soil in full sun. Dill can be grown in containers, in a sheltered corner with plenty of sun. However, it will need staking. The

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art of growing it successfully is to keep cutting the plant for use in the kitchen. That way you will promote new growth and keep the plant reasonably compact. The drawback is that it will be fairly short-lived, so you will have to do successive sowings in different pots to maintain a good supply.

Anethum graveolens) Shop for Herb Seeds

Dill is one of the easiest herbs to grow and would make a great first herb for someone who has never grown herbs before. You'll find lots of uses for both the fronds and the seeds in the kitchen. A sprig of dill will perk up almost any soup, salad, or main dish. You can buy transplants at your local garden center, but there is no need because dill is easy to grow from seeds. You won't even have to start them indoors – just plant your dill seeds right in the garden where you want them to grow.

When to Plant

Dill likes to be planted in cool weather. In warm winter areas that don't experience a hard frost, you can plant dill in fall or winter. In cooler areas, plant dill a week or two before your last hard frost.

After the first sowing, plant again every 10 days or so for a continuous crop.

When growing in containers, use a deep container to accommodate the long roots, and remember that you will eventually have a plant that is three feet tall. Plants grown in containers may require staking.

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Cultivation

Here are a few suggestions to start you on your way to a healthy crop of dill:

Dill, like most herbs, loves to bask in the sun, but will tolerate afternoon shade.

Dill grows up to 3 feet tall, so plant it in the back of your flower, vegetable or herb garden.

Sow seeds close together. This will allow the plants, which blow over easily to support each other.

Cover the seeds lightly, and allow a week or two for them to germinate.

For a continuous crop, sow repeatedly from mid spring to early summer.

Don't plant near caraway, fennel or angelica.

Caterpillars are fond of dill, and can be handpicked if they become a nuisance.

Harvesting and Preserving

Dill is a lovely herb that adds a refreshing flavor to any recipe. Try adding a little dill to a ho-hum recipe, and watch what happens. It's almost magic! This booklet starts with tips on growing, harvesting and preserving dill, and then turns to cooking with dill. These are without a doubt the best dill recipes you'll ever taste!
More...

The best way to use dill is fresh from the garden, so during the growing season, cut your dill to use fresh as you need it. If not kept

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cut, your dill will go to seed, so cut often until you are ready to switch to seed production.

If you find that you have cut more than you can use, dry the excess in the microwave. Spread the dill in a single layer on a paper towel and microwave on high for 3 minutes. The result is beautiful and tasty – much better than dried dill you buy in the grocery store. After microwaving, remove and discard the hard stems, crumble the leaves, and store in an airtight container protected from light.

Once seedheads begin to form, it's time to stop cutting dill for fresh use. Allow the seedheads to develop and dry completely, then cut them. You'll be able to remove the seeds easily with your fingers.

Medicinal Uses:

To brew a stomach–soothing tea, use two teaspoons of mashed seeds per cup of boiling water. Steep for ten minutes. Drink up to three cups a day. In a tincture, take 1/2 to 1 teaspoon up to three times a day. To treat colic or gas in children under two, give small amounts of a weak tea. Many herbalists recommend combining dill and fennel to ease colic in infants.`

Culinary Uses

The taste of dill leaves resembles that of caraway, while the seeds are pungent and aromatic. Freshly cut, chopped leaves enhance the flavor of dips, herb butter, soups, salads, fish dishes, and salads. The seeds are used in pickling and can also improve the taste of roasts, stews

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and vegetables. Try grinding the seeds to use as a salt substitute.

Both the flowering heads and

Pick leaves fresh for eating at any time after the plant has reached maturity. Although leaves can be dried, great care is needed and it is better to concentrate on drying the seed for storage.

Put the flower head upside down in a paper bag and tie the top of the bag. Put in a warm place for a week. The seeds should then separate easily from the husk. Store in an airtight container. The seeds will keep their flavor very well.

Dill is a culinary herb that improves the appetite and digestion. The difference between dill leaf and dill seed lies in the degree of pungency. There are occasions when the seed is better because of its sharper flavor.

Dill doesn't mean pickles but "dill pickles" is so common it seems like one word. Don't confine this versatile herb! A few sprigs work wonders for potato salad and try the yellow flowers in green salads. It is used as a flavoring for soup, lamb stews and grilled or broiled fish. It can also add spiciness to rice dishes and be combined with white wine vinegar to make tasty dill vinegar.

Dill leaf can be used generously in many dishes, as it enhances rather than dominates the flavor of food.

For dill pickles, before it sets seed, add one flower head to a jar of pickled gherkins, cucumbers or cauliflower for a flavor stronger than

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dill leaves but fresher than seeds. Where a salt-free diet must be followed, the seed, whole or ground, is a valuable replacement because of its high mineral content.

Truly a great herb and certainly not a weed!

Source:

Your Backyard Herb Garden

by Miranda Smith

Complete Herb Encyclopedia

by Nico Vermeulen

Encyclopedia of Herbal Medicine

by Andrew Chevallier

The Herbfarm Cookbook

by Jerry Traunfeld

All About Herbs, Avery's FAQs Series

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Why Purchase Herbs At The Supermarket?

By Liz Norman

Herbs are no doubt among the easiest plants to grow in your garden. Many of them are fairly drought tolerant and have a blooming period albeit short. In addition, herbs lend a delicious fragrance to the garden.

While most herbs are easily grown in containers which is a major plus, if you have space, consider planting an entire herb garden. It needn't take that much space. A plot of land measuring approximate 200-400 square feet should do you quite nicely. Find out the diameter of a mature plant; obtain some graph paper and sketch out your garden before you dig a single hole. Remember to allow at least 1 foot of space between mature plants for ease of weeding and pruning.

One of the most fragrant herbs to add to your garden is lavender. The scent of lavender in bloom is heavenly and is wonderful for making scented sachets to hang in your closet or place in your dresser drawers. This is the only herb I would suggest you plant as many as you have space for as those sachets make wonderful gifts.

As the song goes, 4 great savory herbs to add to your garden are Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme. Fresh chopped parsley is a wonder addition to potato and pasta salads, not to mention a lovely garnish for many other dishes. Try drying sage leaves to add to many dishes including stuffing for turkey and chicken. And, both rosemary and thyme are excellent accents when roasting poultry and

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lamb among other savory dishes.

Tarragon is a wonderful addition to soups and vegetables. This herb is also good in tuna, egg, pasta and green salads. Add when making sauces for fish or chicken, it's a must for béarnaise sauce.

If you intend upon canning pickled vegetables from your garden or making pretty vinegars for gifts think about planting some dill. While its true you can purchase dried dill weed very cheaply, there is no way you can get a full stalk of dill unless you grow it or pay rather dearly for it when needed in quantity.

In my opinion, no herb garden is complete without chives. In fact, if I could plant only one herb, it would be chives because they are so very useful. While I love green onions, by the time I get around to using them, alas they all but lifeless. No problem with chives growing right outside my door. They not only add that touch of needed green, they also have that subtle onion flavor which is perfect for salads and potato toppings.

Unfortunately, another one of my favorite herbs is not worth planting. Cilantro tends to bolt so quickly you would be lucky to retrieve a leaf or two. Obviously those that grow cilantro commercially know something we don't know and they aren't telling. If you figure it out please let me in on the secret. I will let you in on my secret for preserving store bought cilantro, however. Place the bunch of cilantro in a glass of water and cover with the plastic bag it came in. This way, the cilantro will stay fresh and crisp for up to 2 weeks in your fridge.

On a final note, let's talk about mint. A favorite of mine is pineapple mint. It has a wonderful fragrance and taste and makes a lovely tea and garnish. However, there is a real problem with mint. It's tangled roots go deep and it tends to try to take over every other plant in the garden. Spray it with Round-up

and it comes right back again. Once planted, you simply can't get rid of it! So, if you want to add mint to your garden, plant it in a container and move the container often enough to insure it doesn't take root in the ground through the drainage hole in the container.

Liz Norman is an avid gardener and a freelance writer. [Click here for](#)

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