

Anise, Sweet Alice

Pimpinella anisum is a member of the Apiaceae (parsley) family.

Anise is an annual herb that reaches a height of about 2 feet. Leaves and seeds are produced in large, loose clusters. Young leaves are broad, up to 1 inch wide, and resemble parsley, while the older leaves are feathery like dill. Small, yellowish white flowers form in rounded clusters with five petals, five stamens, and two styles. Seeds — really dried fruits — are about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch long flattened, oval, downy, and gray-brown, with lengthwise ribs; they're produced in large, loose umbels on tall, rounded, grooved stalks. Anise is frequently confused with sweet anise (also known as Florence fennel and finocchio), but is really quite different. Anise is native to Egypt and the Mediterranean region.

Market Information

Current production and yield. Average yields in California range from 500 to 700 pounds of seed per acre.

Use. Today, anise is cultivated in Europe, India, Mexico, Russia, and the United States. The seed has been used for centuries to flavor pastries, candies, and beverages. The oil distilled from the seed may be used when the seed itself would have an undesirable appearance in the edible product. The oil is also used in medicines and in perfumes, soaps, and other toilet articles. The flavor of the leaves, seed, and oil is sweet, similar to licorice. The green leaves and stalks can be eaten raw, steamed, sautéed, or dried.

Culture

Climatic requirements. Anise requires a frost-free season of at least 120 days for growth. Uniform rainfall or irrigation throughout the growing season is essential because the plant is adversely affected by fluctuating soil moisture.

Propagation and care. The plant grows best in a light, fertile, sandy loam soil with good drainage. Plant the seed about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep in rows 18 to 30 inches apart, about one or two seeds per inch. At this rate, 5 to 10 pounds of seed will plant 1 acre. Anise does not transplant easily. Germination will occur in 7 to 14 days at 70°F. Carefully thin seedlings to 6 or 12 inches apart; again, they do not transplant well. Growth is spindly, so hill-up the



Anise reaches a height of about 2 feet; the young leaves are as wide as 1 inch. (Photo: Marita Cantwell de Trejo)

soil slightly to hold the new plants upright; additional support may be needed later.

While the seed in the umbel is still green, commercial growers either pull the plants out of the ground or cut the tops by hand. They then tie the harvested material into bundles and stack them in conical piles with the fruiting heads toward the center. The seed continue to ripen with little discoloration or shattering. After this curing, the crop is threshed.

— Rust can be severe under California conditions.

Storing seeds in airtight containers will help retain flavoring properties for years. Oil distilled from seeds should be stored in a tightly sealed container away from excessive heat.

Sources

Seed

Abundant Life Seed Foundation, P.O. Box 772, Port Townsend, WA 98368

Bountiful Gardens, 5798 Ridgewood Road, Willits, CA 95490

Caprilands Herb Farm, 534 Silver Street, Coventry, CT 06238

Comstock, Ferre & Co., 263 Main Street, Wethersfield, CT 06109

De Giorgi Co., Inc., P.O. Box 413, Council Bluffs, IA 51502

Gurney's Seed & Nursery Co., Yankton, SD 57079

J. L. Hudson, Seedsman, P.O. Box 1058, Redwood City, CA 94064

Johnny's Selected Seeds, 299 Foss Hill Road, Albion, ME 04910

Le Jardin du Gourmet, P.O. Box 75, St. Johnsbury Center, VT 05863

Nichols Garden Nursery, 1190 North Pacific Highway, Albany, OR 97321

Otto Richter & Sons Ltd., Box 26, Goodwood, Ontario, Canada L0C 1A0

Pinetree Garden Seeds, Route 100, New Gloucester, ME 04260

Redwood City Seed Co., P.O. Box 361, Redwood City, CA 94064

Stokes Seeds Inc., P.O. Box 548, Buffalo, NY 14240

Taylor's Herb Gardens, Inc., 1535 Lone Oak Road, Vista, CA 92084

Thompson & Morgan, P.O. Box 1308, Jackson, NJ 08527

More information

Kowalchik, Claire, et al., eds. 1987. *Rodale's illustrated encyclopedia of herbs*, pp. 14-16. Rodale Press, Emmaus, PA.

Newcomb, Duane, and Karen Newcomb. 1989. *The complete vegetable gardener's sourcebook*. Prentice Hall Press, West Nyack, NY.

Organic Gardening Magazine. 1978. *The encyclopedia of organic gardening*, pp. 38-39. Rodale Press, Emmaus, PA.

Stephens, James. *Minor vegetables*. 1988. Cooperative Extension Bulletin SP-40, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

Williams, Louis. 1960. *Drug and condiment plants*, pp. 5-6. Agric. Handb. 172, USDA-ARS, Washington, DC.

Prepared by Yvonne Savio and Claudia Myers.