

## Dill

*Anethum graveolens* is a member of the Apiaceae (parsley) family. Varieties include Bouquet and Mammoth.

Dill, an annual of the parsley family, is indigenous to the Mediterranean region and southern Russia. The medium-sized herb reaches 3 feet in height, and has small, feathery, blue-green leaves, yellow flowers, and hollow stems. One long, hollow stalk comes up from the root. The fruit (or seeds) are ribbed, flattened, elliptical, and about 1/8 inch long. Dill is related to anise, caraway, coriander, cumin, fennel, and parsley.

### Market Information

**Current production and yield.** India and Pakistan are the principal world producers of dill. Egypt, Fiji, Mexico, the Netherlands, the United States, England, Hungary, Germany, and Holland also have commercial production areas.

**Use.** Both the dried seeds and the fresh, feathery leaves or fronds (called dillweed) are used in cooking. Dill is well known for its use in pickles and in Scandinavian and German food, although the plant is indigenous to southern Europe. The ancient Greeks and Romans made great use of dill, and fresh dill is still used widely in Greece, especially in the winter. The herb is very pungent. The dried seeds lose some of their flavor, however, and are slightly reminiscent of caraway — hardly surprising, since they share the same essential oil. Use dill seeds and dillweed with pickles, salad dressings, potatoes, tomatoes, cream, cucumbers, cream cheese, fish, lamb, and string beans.

**Packaging.** Dill is packaged 12 to 18 plants to the bunch for fresh market sales.

### Culture

**Climatic requirements.** Dill is a hardy plant that thrives on long days and cool weather. It is sensitive to stresses such as insufficient water, hail, high temperatures, strong winds, and hard rains during flowering.

**Propagation and care.** The reported life zone is 45° to 80°F with an annual rainfall of 20 to 60 inches and a soil pH of 5.3 to 7.8. Propagate by seed in spring or autumn. If planted in the spring, germina-



Dill reaches a height of 3 feet and has small, feathery, blue-green leaves, yellow flowers, and hollow stems. (Photo: Charlotte Glenn)

tion will take 10 days to 2 weeks. If planted in the late fall, germination won't take place until the following spring. Plant in light, well-drained soil (preferably deep, fertile loam soils) in a sunny, sheltered location. Plant 15 to 20 seeds per foot of row 1 inch deep, and thin to 3 or 4 plants per foot with rows 1 to 3 feet apart. One or two pounds of seed are needed per acre for dill grown for fresh market.

Diseases generally do not present problems. Insect pests include aphids, including "carnation aphids," green plant lice that colonize the dill heads, and seedcorn maggot is a small, legless maggot that feeds on and destroys germinating seeds. Proper rotation and field selection can minimize insect problems.

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Dill competes poorly with weeds. Cultivate as often as necessary when weeds are small. Proper cultivation, field selection, and rotations can reduce or eliminate the need for chemical weed control. Irrigate during any periods of growth. Wind can destroy the tall, spindly stalks. The seeds ripen in autumn and can be collected as soon as the first few fall, 2 to 3 weeks after blossoming. Snip off the flower heads and spread them out on trays in the sun for a few days. When the flower heads are completely dry, the seeds will release easily from the heads. Store in airtight containers.

Fresh dillweed can be refrigerated for only a couple of days before it droops and loses flavor. When drying the aromatic, anise-tasting leaves, start cutting the leafy stalks before the flower heads appear. Spread the leaves on a wire rack in a shady, cool place.

In large-scale production, shattering losses can be a problem. Seeds tend to ripen at different times, so the timeliness of harvest is critical to maximize seed yield. If you are growing dill for its essential oil, harvest it before it flowers and then steam-distill it the same day.

### Sources

#### Seed

NOTE: Dill seed is widely available.

#### More information

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