

FENNEL



FENNEL belongs to the Umbelliferae family, which includes carrots, parsley and dill. All the parts of the fennel plant are edible, and each part has a slightly different flavor. The bulb has a mild licorice flavor that decreases when cooked, the stalk is stronger tasting, and the feathery leaves are very mild. Fennel seeds were used by the Puritans, who called them meeting seeds, and chewed them during long church services to quiet the rumblings in their stomachs! Native to Southern Europe, fennel is planted in the late summer and is harvested in the early fall in the Northeast.

STORAGE

- ◆ Remove the leaves and stalk from the bulb and refrigerate unwashed, separately wrapped in damp towels. Fennel will keep for **3 or 4 days** stored this way but it is best when used fresh.
- ◆ **To dry** fennel leaves for longer term storage, **hang them upside down** in bunches in a cool, well ventilated place until completely dry. Store in a glass or plastic container with a tight fitting lid.

PREPARATION

- ◆ Cut off the stalks where they meet the bulb. Rinse the bulb thoroughly. Cut in quarters and remove the core if it seems very hard. **Slice or chop** the bulb as desired.
- ◆ The fennel bulb can be **grilled, sautéed, baked, braised, or steamed**. It can be used as a substitute for celery. Try it sliced thinly in green salads, chopped finely and added to chicken or tuna salad, or served on a raw vegetable platter. To avoid discoloration sprinkle raw fennel slices with a bit of lemon juice.
- ◆ **The stalk** of the fennel plant is usually tough and stringy. It is **best suited for making soup stocks** and for flavoring soups and stews. Strain the fennel stalk out before serving or peel the stalk first if you plan on leaving it in the soup or stew.
- ◆ **Fennel leaves** can be added to salads, soups, or other dishes. Try using fennel leaves in place of dill. Delicious with lemon and butter on baked or broiled fish.
- ◆ **Fennel seeds** are used as a **flavoring for foods**, and can also be chewed as a breath freshener, to reduce hunger, and to aid digestion.

Nutritional Information

Fennel is a good source of Vitamin C and also contains calcium, folate, and iron. Vitamin C is important in immune response, wound healing, and allergic reactions. Vitamin C also helps with iron absorption. Calcium can maintain good bone health and may reduce risk of osteoporosis. A healthy diet with enough folate may reduce a woman's risk of having a child with certain birth defects of the brain or spinal chord. Iron is important for healthy blood cells. Inadequate iron intake can lead to anemia.

Fennel Recipes

Braised Florentine Fennel (Serves 4)

- 1 large or 2 small fennel bulbs, stems trimmed off (can be saved for another use)
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 2 teaspoons fennel seed, crushed
- 1-2 Tablespoons fennel leaves, finely chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 Tablespoon lemon juice



Cut fennel bulbs in half lengthwise through their cores and cut each half into 2-3 equal wedges. Place in saucepan with olive oil, fennel seed, fennel leaves, salt and one inch of water. Cover and cook over moderate heat for about 20 minutes, shaking occasionally, until the fennel is soft but still intact. Add a little more water while cooking, if needed, to maintain a small amount of liquid in the bottom of the pan. The olive oil and water should emulsify into a flavorful, thick broth. Squeeze in some lemon juice to balance the olive oil. Adjust seasoning, and serve fennel with the broth poured on top.

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Grilled Fennel and Tomatoes with Black Olives and Basil (Serves 4)

- 2 fennel bulbs, trimmed and cut lengthwise into 1/2 inch thick wedges
- 4 plum tomatoes, halved
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 cup coarsely chopped pitted black olives
- 1/3 cup coarsely chopped fresh basil
- Juice of one lemon



Prepare a medium-hot charcoal fire in the grill (or preheat the broiler in an oven.) Rub the fennel and tomatoes with 1/4 cup of the olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Grill or broil until the fennel is slightly soft and the tomatoes are nice and brown, 3-4 minutes on each side. Remove from grill or broil and place in a large bowl with the olives, basil, lemon juice, and remaining olive oil. Season with salt and pepper, toss lightly, and serve.

Recipe adapted from The New All Purpose Joy of Cooking, by Irma S. Rombauer, Marion Rombauer Becker and Ethan Becker, Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1997.

Fennel and Mushroom Salad (Serves 6)

- 8 ounces mushrooms, wiped clean and thinly sliced
- 1 fennel bulb, thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 3 Tablespoons olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 1 1/2 Tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon (optional)
- 1/2 cup shaved or grated Parmesan cheese



In medium bowl, toss the fennel and mushrooms with the lemon juice and salt and pepper to taste. In another small bowl whisk together the olive oil, garlic, and tarragon and pour the mixture over the vegetables. Toss them to coat evenly and sprinkle with the Parmesan cheese and serve.

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