

Home Gardening Series

Fennel

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Vegetables

Environment

Light – sunny
Soil – well-drained loam
Fertility – medium
pH – 5.5 to 7.0
Temperature – warm
Moisture – moist

Culture

Planting – direct seed, early spring
Spacing – 12 x 24 inches
Hardiness – semi-hardy perennial
Fertilizer – medium

Fennel – *Foeniculum vulgare*

Fennel, a semi-hardy perennial, is cultivated as an annual. Two kinds are commonly grown in the garden: sweet fennel and Florence fennel. Sweet fennel is more popular and reaches a height of 4 to 6 feet. Florence fennel or finocchio grows about 2 feet high and has thickened, overlapping leaf bases.

Fennel is a member of the family Apiaceae, which also includes dill, cumin, coriander, caraway and parsley. It is grown for its feathery foliage, which is used fresh; for its bulbous root and stalks, which can be used raw or cooked; and for its dried seeds, which are used to flavor savory Mediterranean dishes.

Cultural Practices

Fennel grows best on sunny, well-drained, medium-fertility soil that has plenty of lime. It is propagated from seeds sown 1/8 to 1/4 inch



deep in open ground in early spring. Thin sweet fennel plants to stand about 18 inches apart in rows 24 inches apart. Fennel can reach 4 to 6 feet high and shade out neighboring plants. Plant it on the north and east side of the garden to reduce the shading effect. If plants are to be used like endive or celery, cut and use flower stalks when they are about to bloom. When seed on the flower stalk matures, harvest and store in an airtight container.

Space Florence fennel plants 6 to 12 inches apart in the row. When the thickened, overlapping leaf bases form a swelling (called *apple*) about the size of an egg, heap a little earth halfway up the base. Cutting can usually begin 10 days later.

Fennel is a favorite of the Yellow and Black Swallowtail butterfly larvae. If not controlled, they can defoliate the plant in a few days. Use a method of control such as Bt (*bacillus thuringiensis*) to preserve the foliage.

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Cultivars

Crop	Cultivar	Days to Maturity	Seed Per 100 Feet of Row	Remarks
Fennel	Florence	100	1/4 ounce	Anise-like flavored leaves for salads, eggs, fish and sauces seasoning. Delicious bulbous stems.
	Bronze	100	1/4 ounce	Similar to Florence fennel, bronze-colored leaves, non-bulbing.
	Zefa Fino	80	1/4 ounce	Bulb type, bolt resistant. Large, flat-round bulbs.
	Orion	85	1/4 ounce	Large, smooth bulbs, uniform and early. Crisp and mildly anise-flavored, compact plants.

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