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HerbClip News

Fennel

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*, Apiaceae) is a biennial or perennial herb, depending on the climate, with feathered leaves and umbels (clusters) of yellow flowers.¹ There are several varieties of fennel. Bitter fennel (*F. vulgare* var. *amara*) originates from the Mediterranean area and can be found undomesticated in North Africa, Spain, France, and Portugal. It has been widely cultivated in Germany, India, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Italy. Sweet fennel (*F. vulgare* var. *dulce*) may have originated on the island of Malta and is now grown in Greece, Italy, and France, as well as around the world. The Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians cultivated fennel for its succulent shoots and fragrant fruits.²

In ancient times, the herb was thought to promote longevity and vigor, as well as courage, and was used for these purposes by both soldiers and Olympians. The seeds were chewed by Roman soldiers and Christian monks to stave off hunger. It was used to irradicate poisons, strengthen the eyesight, and ward off evil spirits. Both Eastern and Western herbal traditions promote it for spleen, gall bladder, and liver issues.¹ It is also considered helpful for digestive problems such as indigestion, flatulence, nausea, and colic. Fennel has also been consumed in cases of obesity, ancient Greeks having recognized its benefits for slimming, and is included in the British Herbal Pharmacopoeia for conjunctivitis and pharyngitis.

In Ayurveda, fennel seeds are used to promote the digestive fire (*agni*), alleviate cramping and flatulence, and abdominal pain, and soothe difficult or burning urination.³ They are often consumed roasted, a teaspoon after meals, and combine well with coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*, Apiaceae) and cumin (*Cuminum cyminum*, Apiaceae). Fennel is also recommended to calm the nerves and promote mental alertness.

Therapeutic actions include tonic, expectorant, aphrodisiac, rejuvenative, stomachic, antiseptic, carminative, emmenagogue, antispasmodic, diuretic, and stimulant.^{2,3}

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References

¹Lawless J. *The Encyclopedia of Essential Oils*. San Francisco, CA: Conari Press; 2013.

²Battaglia S. *The Complete Guide to Aromatherapy*, 2nd ed. Virginia, QLD, Australia: Perfect Potions; 2003.

³Frawley D, Lad V. *The Yoga of Herbs – An Ayurvedic Guide to Herbal Medicine*. Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press; 1986.