"The fennel is, beyond every other vegetable, delicious," wrote Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States and a keen observer of the natural world. He grew fennel (Foeniculum vulgare) in his kitchen garden at Monticello, not only for food but also for its therapeutic qualities.

Medicinally, fennel seeds relieve stomach bloating and gas, which is why they are frequently served after dinner in South Asian restaurants. The seeds also make an effective breath sweetener after dining.

**SEEDY SOLUTIONS**

**Eyewash** A mild solution made from about one-half cup (125 mL) crushed seeds infused in one to two cups (250 to 500 mL) cold water for about one hour makes an effective eyewash for treating conjunctivitis, a chronic or long-term inflammation of the eyelids and eyelashes, or plain old sore eyes.

**Gargle** Fennel seeds are a traditional remedy for asthma and other respiratory problems. The seeds are a rich source of creosol and alpha-pinene, effective for loosening bronchial secretions. An infusion of seeds may be taken as a gargle for sore throats and as a mild expectorant.

**Diuretic** Fennel is also a diuretic and herbalists recommend the seeds for the treatment of kidney stones. Combined with urinary antiseptics such as uva-ursi (Arctostaphylos uva-ursi), the herb makes a beneficial remedy for cystitis.

**Promote lactation** Research shows that fennel contains a mild form of the hormone estrogen, and consequently women have used it for centuries to promote lactation. Recommended dosage is two teaspoons (10 mL) crushed seeds per one cup (250 mL) boiling water. Drink up to three cups daily.

**FENNEL FOR THE FAMILY**

Fennel is also safe for children and as an infusion or syrup can be given for colic and painful teething in babies.

Pregnant women, and those aspiring to be pregnant, should avoid fennel and its essential oil, however, as they can induce abortion. As with all essential oils, fennel oil should not be taken internally or applied topically undiluted.

Cooked fennel offers a delicious complement to fish. Try it in the delicious recipe on page 156.

**fennel IN THE GARDEN**

Fennel, a member of the carrot and parsley families, is a perennial hardy in zones 5 to 10 and should always be planted on the north side of your garden as it can grow as high as 6 feet (2 metres) and will shade your other plants. Do not plant fennel close to bush beans, caraway, tomatoes, or kohlrabi, as these plants don't like each other. Certain herbs, particularly coriander, will also hinder seed development in fennel, which prefers a humus-rich, well-drained soil in full sun. The type of soil will affect the colour of fennel's foliage. In poor, sandy soils, the fronds will tend to be yellow-green. In rich clay soils, they will be a dark blue-green.

The most popular variety grown for its leaves is sweet fennel (Foeniculum vulgare dulce). A sub-variety known as bronze fennel (Foeniculum vulgare dulce 'Rubrum') is grown for its very elegant bronze red, lacy foliage, but its leaves can be used in the kitchen just like those of sweet fennel. Florence fennel, which is usually grown as an annual, develops a bulbous root. With its subtle anise flavour, the root can be served as a crisp raw vegetable sliced into salads, or baked or sautéed and served with chicken or fish dishes.
favourite FISH WITH FENNEL

Try this dish with fresh home-baked bread and a nice crisp, dry white wine. If fresh ling cod isn’t available almost any fish—even shellfish—will make a reasonable substitute.

1 Tbsp (15 mL) butter, coconut, or olive oil
1 large organic red onion, chopped
2 large organic fennel bulbs, chopped (keep the fronds as a garnish)
6 cloves organic garlic, crushed
1 tsp (5 mL) fennel seeds, crushed
1 tsp (5 mL) fresh or 1/2 tsp (2 mL) dried rosemary
1/2 cup (125 mL) dry white wine
1/4 tsp (1 mL) cayenne (optional)
Zest of 1 organic lemon
8 small organic potatoes, cut into bite-size pieces
1 – 10 oz (284 mL) can plum tomatoes, drained and chopped
2 cups (500 mL) clam juice
1 lb (500 g) ling cod, cut into bite-size pieces
Salt and pepper to taste

In a large cast-iron pot, heat oil and sauté onion and fennel until soft. Add garlic, fennel seeds, and rosemary. Raise heat to medium-high and add wine, cayenne, lemon zest, potatoes, tomatoes, and clam juice. Bring to a boil, cover, and simmer until potatoes are tender, about 25 minutes. Add fish to the stew and cook until tender, about 5 to 10 minutes longer. Add salt and pepper to taste. If stew is too heavy in taste or consistency, add more wine or water. Serves 4.

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