

FENNEL

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) is a perennial herb that belongs to the carrot family. Though its thick stalks with feathery leaves and bright poofs of yellow flowers are native to the Mediterranean region, they grow wild on the side of roads everywhere from Italy to California to Australia, where it's earned full-on invasive weed status.



The most common cultivated fennel plant is called Florence fennel, and most parts of the plant are edible: while the hollow fennel stalks can be a bit tough, its edible white bulb is treated as a vegetable and its leaves (which are similar in consistency to dill), fruits (colloquially called seeds), pollen, and essential oils are incorporated into dishes all over the world.

Fennel can be eaten raw or cooked. It works well shaved into fresh salads, or braised in a thick sauce or roasted and served with vegies and grains.

Fresh fennel bulbs have a celery-esque crunchy texture when eaten raw, but when roasted or braised, they turn silky. Bright green fresh fennel leaves add an aromatic, bittersweet pop of flavour as a garnish to rich savoury or sweet dishes, or incorporated into salads and sauces. When making a roast chicken, add wedges of chopped fennel bulb into the pan, along with shallots and garlic halved lengthwise; as the chicken crisps up, the roasted fennel will turn golden brown and soak up all pan juices, caramelizing to a near-melted consistency.

- Make a simple fennel and orange salad - toss sliced fennel with orange segments, sliced red onion (or shallots) and chopped fresh parsley and dress with oil, salt and pepper.
- For an easy side dish - sauté fennel in oil until tender, place in baking dish, grate parmesan cheese on top and bake until golden and crunchy.
- Fennel is great with roast meat or chicken - place fennel and carrots in a baking dish, drizzle with oil, honey and a splash of balsamic vinegar and bake until tender.

Raw Creamed Fennel

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups raw fennel (1 bulb)

3 sticks celery

1 avocado

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup lemon juice

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sea salt

1 cup ice

Combine everything in a blender until smooth.

Adjust seasoning to taste.

Add more lemon, salt or water as required.

Serve in small bowls.

Garnish with fennel leaves.