

DILL

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Dill, *Anethum graveolens*, is a tender annual in the carrot family (Apiaceae), native to Asia Minor and the Mediterranean region. The tall, leggy plant is best known for its use in pickling, but the foliage and seeds may also be used in soups, salads, breads, party dips and fish dishes. In cut flower arrangements, floral designers value dill as a feathery green filler.

Dill grows best in a well drained, slightly acidic soil, rich in organic matter. Plant dill in a location that receives at least 6-8 hours of direct sunlight daily. Also, choose a spot that is protected from high winds because the tall, hollow stalks can easily be blown over unless they are staked.

Because dill does not transplant easily, sow seeds directly into the ground where the plants are to grow. Begin sowing seeds after the danger of spring frost is past. Several crops can be harvested during the summer and fall by planting seeds every 2-3 weeks through midsummer. Set the seeds 1/4" deep in rows 2 feet apart. When seedlings are 2 inches high, thin them to stand 10-12 inches apart. Keep the soil free of weeds and relatively moist.

As with most herbs, dill does not require frequent fertilizing. Generally, a light feeding of a 5-10-5 fertilizer applied once in late spring should be adequate. Use it at the rate of 3 ounces per ten feet of row. For dill grown outdoors in containers or indoors, use a liquid fertilizer at one half the label recommended strength every 4-6 weeks.

Growing dill indoors can be done, as long as adequate light is provided. A location that receives at least 5-6 hours of direct sunlight is best, otherwise 12 hours of fluorescent light should be used. Pots should be fairly deep and must have holes in the bottom to provide good drainage. You'll probably want to stake dill grown indoors because it will be even taller and spindlier than outside, due to lower light levels.

Dill Leaf

Green dill foliage can be harvested anytime during the growing season until the umbrella-like flower clusters open. Because dill loses its flavor quickly, it is best to use it



Figure 1. Dill.

fresh as soon after picking as possible. Dill foliage can be dried by hanging the plant upside down in a warm, breezy place out of direct sunlight. Like many other herbs, much of the flavor is lost in drying, although the bright green color is usually retained.

Dill Seed

To harvest the seeds, cut the flower stalks just before seeds begin to ripen and turn a tan color. Hang the stalks upside down in a warm, well ventilated room away from direct light. Place a small paper bag up around the flower heads, fastened to the stalks. Poke a few holes in the sides of the bag for air circulation. As the seeds ripen, they will drop

and collect on the bottom of the bag.

Seeds can be stored up to a year in air-tight containers as long as they're kept away from heat and bright light. Seeds must be very dry before they are stored; if any signs of moisture appear in the container shortly after storage, remove the seeds and dry them further.

Pickling

For dill pickles, a whole flower head and leaves are often placed in each jar with the pickled vegetables. The head should still be green and flexible; flowers should have given way to seeds, but the seeds do not need to be fully mature.

Photograph by Antoine McKinney.

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