

Anise

Botanical: *Pimpinella anisum* (LINN.)

Family: N.O. Umbelliferae

Part Used

Seeds

Habitat

It is a native of Egypt, Greece, Crete and Asia Minor and was cultivated by the ancient Egyptians. It was well known to the Greeks, being mentioned by Dioscorides and Pliny and was cultivated in Tuscany in Roman times. In the Middle Ages its cultivation spread to Central Europe.

Description

Anise is a dainty, white-flowered umbelliferous annual, about 18 inches high, with secondary feather-like leaflets of bright green, hence its name (of mediaeval origin), *Pimpinella*, from *dipinella*, or twice-pinnate, in allusion to the form of the leaves.

History

In this country Anise has been in use since the fourteenth century, and has been cultivated in English gardens from the middle of the sixteenth century, but it ripens its seeds here only in very warm summers, and it is chiefly in warmer districts that it is grown on a commercial scale, Southern Russia, Bulgaria, Germany, Malta, Spain, Italy, North Africa and Greece producing large quantities. It has also been introduced into India and South America. The cultivated plant attains a considerably larger size than the wild one.

In the East Anise was formerly used with other spices in part payment of taxes. 'Ye pay tithes of Mint, Anise and Cummin,' we read in the 23rd chapter of St. Matthew, but some authorities state that Anise is an incorrect rendering and should have been translated 'Dill.'

In Virgil's time, Anise was used as a spice. *Mustacae*, a spiced cake of the Romans introduced at the end of a rich meal, to prevent indigestion, consisted of meal, with Anise, Cummin and other aromatics. Such a cake was sometimes brought in at the end of a marriage feast, and is, perhaps, the origin of our spiced wedding cake.

On the Continent, especially in Germany, many cakes have an aniseed flavouring, and Anise is also used as a flavouring for soups.

It is largely employed in France, Spain Italy and South America in the preparation of cordial liqueurs. The liqueur Anisette added to cold water on a hot summer's day, makes a most refreshing drink.

Anise is one of the herbs that was supposed to avert the Evil Eye.

The oil extracted from the seed is said to prove a capital bait for mice, if smeared on traps. It is poisonous to pigeons.

Turner's *Herbal*, 1551, says that 'Anyse maketh the breth sweter and swageth payne.' 'The seeds,' says Delamer, *Kitchen Garden*, 1861, 'are much used by distillers to give flavour to cordial liqueurs.' Anisette is a liqueur flavoured with aniseed. Langham, *Garden Health*, 1683, says: 'For the dropsie, fill an old cock with Polipody and Aniseeds and seethe him well, and drink the broth.' The leaves are useful for seasoning some dishes. The essential oil of Anise is a good preventive of mould in paste. The ground seeds form an ingredient of sachet powders.

Cultivation

Sow the seed in dry, light soil, on a warm, sunny border, early in April, where the plants are to remain. When they come up, thin them and keep them clean from weeds. Allow about a foot each way. The seeds may also be sown in pots in heat and removed to a warm site in May.

The seeds will ripen in England in good seasons if planted in a warm and favourable situation, though they are not successful everywhere, and can hardly be looked upon as a remunerative crop. The plant flowers in July, and if the season prove warm, will ripen in autumn, when the plants are cut down and the seeds threshed out.

Part Used

The fruit, or so-called seeds. When threshed out, the seeds may be easily dried in trays, in a current of air in half-shade, out-of-doors, or by moderate heat. When dry, they are greyish brown, ovate, hairy, about one-fifth of an inch long, with ten crenate ribs and often have the stalk attached. They should be free from earthy matter. The taste is sweet and spicy, and the odour aromatic and agreeable.

The commercial varieties differ considerably in size, but the larger varieties alone are official. The Spanish Anise, sold as Alicante Anise, are the largest and the best adapted for pharmaceutical use, yielding about 3 per cent. of oil. Russian and German fruits are smaller and darker and are the variety generally used for distillation of the volatile oil. Italian Anise is frequently adulterated with Hemlock fruit.

Constituents

Anise fruit yields on distillation from 2.5 to 3.5 per cent. of a fragrant, syrupy, volatile oil, of which *anethol*, present to about 90 per cent., is the principal aromatic constituent. It has a strong Anise odour and separates in the form of shining white crystalline scales on cooling the oil. Other constituents of the fruit are a fixed oil, choline, sugar and mucilage.

Oil of Anise, distilled in Europe from the fruits of *Pimpinella anisum*, Anise, and in China from the fruits of *Illicium anisatum*, Star Anise, a small tree indigenous to China, is colourless, or very pale yellow, with taste and odour like the fruit. The oils

obtainable from these two fruits are identical in composition, and nearly the same in most of their characters, but that from Star Anise fruit congeals at a lower temperature. The powdered drug from Star Anise is administered in India as a substitute for the official fruit, and the oil is employed for its aromatic, carminative and stimulant properties. The bulk of the oil in commerce is obtained from the Star Anise fruit in China. The fruits are also often imported into France and the oil extracted there. Chinese Anise oil is harsh in taste.

Medicinal Action and Uses

Carminative and pectoral. Anise enjoys considerable reputation as a medicine in coughs and pectoral affections. In hard, dry coughs where expectoration is difficult, it is of much value. It is greatly used in the form of lozenges and the seeds have also been used for smoking, to promote expectoration.

The volatile oil, mixed with spirits of wine forms the liqueur Anisette, which has a beneficial action on the bronchial tubes, and for bronchitis and spasmodic asthma, Anisette, if administered in hot water, is an immediate palliative.

For infantile catarrh, Aniseed tea is very helpful. It is made by pouring half a pint of boiling water on 2 teaspoonsful of bruised seed. This, sweetened, is given cold in doses of 1 to 3 teaspoonsful frequently.

Gerard said:

'Aniseed helpeth the yeoxing or hicket (hiccough) and should be given to young children to eat, which are like to have the falling sickness (epilepsy), or to/such as have it by patrimony or succession.'

The stimulant and carminative properties of Anise make it useful in flatulency and colic. It is used as an ingredient of cathartic and aperient pills, to relieve flatulence and diminish the griping of purgative medicines, and may be given with perfect safety in convulsions. For colic, the dose is 10 to 30 grains of bruised or powdered seeds infused in distilled water, taken in wineglassful doses, or 4 to 20 drops of the essential oil on sugar. For the restlessness of languid digestion, a dose of essence of aniseed in hot water at bedtime is much commended.

In the Paregoric Elixir (Compound Tincture of Camphor), prescribed as a sedative cordial by doctors, oil of Anise is also included - 30 drops in a pint of the tincture.

Anise oil is a good antiseptic and is used, mixed with oil of Peppermint or Gaultheria (Wintergreen) to flavour aromatic liquid dentrifices.

Oil of Anise is used also against insects especially when mixed with oil of Sassafras and Carbolic oil.