

# The Herb Society of America's Essential Facts for Dill *Anethum graveolens*



Image courtesy of Billi Parus

## QUICK FACTS

**Family:** Apiaceae (Umbelliferae)  
**Latin Name:** *Anethum graveolens*  
**Growth:** annual, sometimes biennial  
**Light:** full sun  
**Soil:** light to medium texture, well-drained  
**Water:** keep soil moist but not saturated, overhead watering at seedling stage  
**Pests:** aphids  
**Diseases:** root rot

**History and Origin** *Anethum graveolens* is believed to have its beginnings in the Mediterranean region. The plant has a long and ancient history in many countries as a culinary and medicinal herb. The earliest known record of dill as a medicinal herb was found in Egypt 5,000 years ago when the plant was referred to as a “soothing medicine.” Gladiators were fed meals covered with dill because it was hoped that the herb would grant them valor and courage. Dill seeds are often called “meetinghouse seeds” because they were chewed during long church services to keep members awake or kids quiet. The seeds were also chewed in order to freshen the breath and quiet noisy stomachs.

**Myths and Folklore** Dill was believed to provide protection from witchcraft, most likely because of its strong smell. Charms were often made from sprigs of dill to provide protection from witchcraft; they were hung around the house or worn on the clothing. Dill was often added to love potions and aphrodisiacs to make them more effective. The herb was also believed to have an effect on marriages bringing happiness and good fortune. In Germany and Belgium, brides would attach a sprig of dill to their wedding gowns or they would carry it in their bouquets in the hopes that happiness would bless their marriages.

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**How is dill used?** In the food industry dill is primarily used for making dill pickles. Dill seed can be used whole for this purpose, or dill weed oil might be used. Many home canners often elect to use the whole seed head for making pickles. The essential oil of dill is also used by the food industry for flavoring and as an ingredient in liqueurs. Dill weed, seed, and oil are frequently added to baked goods, snacks, condiments, and meat products. The fragrance industry makes much use of dill essential oil to produce soaps, perfumes, detergents, creams, and lotions. The general home cook most often uses dill in two forms: dill seed and dill weed. Cooks often prefer to use dill weed because it has a stronger flavor than that of dill seed. The seeds are often used as a condiment, but they can also be combined with onions, cabbage, potatoes, cumin, chili powder, and paprika. Additionally, they can be added to casseroles, lamb, fish, vegetable dishes, and sauces. Chopped or whole dill weed can be added to soups, stews, casseroles, meat dishes, pasta, and eggs. It can also enhance all types of sauces, dips, butters and cheeses. An especially good combination is that of salmon and dill.

**How do I Harvest Dill?** The optimum time for harvesting dill is in the early morning. The higher moisture content of the plants when harvested at this time results in better flavor and the possibility of seed shattering is reduced. Do not let your

dill plants bolt if you want a continuous supply of dill for harvesting, keep their tops trimmed regularly. Dill weed is best harvested before the plant is fully mature and before the flower buds have opened.

Dill seed is harvested at the end of the plant's life cycle. The flowers will be spent, the stems will start drying out, and the seeds will have turned a golden brown color. Dill seed can be easily collected by hand using the following method: First, place a brown paper bag over the seed heads and tie the opening closed. Cut the stem off at the base of the plant. Next, hang the stems upside down in a warm, well ventilated area to dry. Take the stems down after about two weeks and crush the dried seed heads in your hands over a container to separate the seeds from the seed head. An additional method involves laying the freshly harvested seed heads on a cookie sheet and then placing them in the freezer. Remove the frozen seed heads after a few days and then rub the seed heads between your hands over a piece of paper to harvest.

**What about storage?** Fresh cut dill can be stored in the refrigerator safely for two to three days. The stems can be placed in a cup of water to help keep the leaves fresh. A majority of cooks prefer fresh dill to dried because of its superior flavor. However, there are several methods for preparing dill weed for long term storage. To dry naturally, lay freshly harvested dill on waxed paper and place it in a warm, dark spot with good air circulation. Dill weed can also be dried in a food dehydrator or frozen. The leaves should then be placed in an airtight container and stored in a dark place.



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