

Try Day Friday – May
Welcome to fennel season!
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What exactly are fennel? Fennel belongs to the same vegetable family as parsley, carrots, dill and coriander (or cilantro). It's made up of a white or pale green bulb, with stalks topped with feathery green leaves, called fronds. These feathery leaves may look very similar to fresh dill, but their taste is different. The bulb, stalks, leaves and seeds are all edible.

Especially popular in Mediterranean and Italian cuisines, the fennel bulb's texture is similar to celery...some would say it is like a cross between an onion and celery. Fennel is best from autumn through early spring because it grows well in cool weather. Some may think leeks and fennel are related. While they are both used in Mediterranean cuisine, they are actually from two different vegetable families and provide different flavors. Leeks are part of the onion family, and look like large thick green onions. Fennel does NOT taste like licorice, but instead provides a light, crunchy spring-like quality.

How do you choose them? When selecting fennel, you want to look for bulbs that are white or pale green. The stalks and leaves should be green, with a fragrant aroma. The bulbs come in various sizes...a typical size is about the size of a tennis ball. Avoid bulbs that are split or cracked, or have discoloration or bruising. You don't want there to be flowering buds on the fennel, which means it has passed its optimum maturity.



What about fennel seeds?

The fennel seeds are considered the dried fruit of the fennel plant. When a fennel plant passes maturity, it flowers, and then when the flowers die, seeds form in clumps. Fennel seeds are oval shaped and green or greenish brown in color. Bright green fennel seeds are best and are generally the freshest and highest quality. You will often see fennel seeds used to flavor breads, sausages and curry dishes. Fennel seeds can actually help with digestion, and can relieve bloating and fluid retention. You may notice a very slight licorice taste that can be more prominent in fennel seeds, more so than in fresh fennel.

Chew fennel seeds after a meal? Some say doing this can help prevent gas and indigestion! And, ditch the after-dinner mint...chewing fennel seeds could also help freshen your breath and take away the smell and taste of garlic! You will sometimes see a bowl of fennel seeds when you leave an Indian restaurant...now you know why!

How do you store fennel?

It's ideal to store fennel in the refrigerator. It will last for 7-10 days, especially if it was recently harvested and purchased at a local farmers' market.

- Cut off the stalks if they are still attached...near the bulb.
- Clean the bulb to remove any dirt or debris.
- Then, cut a small part of the bottom to get a stable base. You can then cut straight down to slice the bulb in half or into quarters. If the outer layers are bruised or wilted, you can peel those away if desired.
- Finally, you can lay the bulb down and slice it crosswise to your desired thickness. Many recipes call for thin slices, but it really depends on what you are making and your personal preferences.



Creamy Cucumber and Fennel Salad

Have you wondered what do with fennel? This salad is an excellent reason to try this interesting vegetable! And, it is possible to have a healthy creamy salad...the yogurt adds the creaminess and the dill and vinegar add great flavor.

MAKE THE DRESSING

- 1 cup nonfat plain yogurt
- 3 Tbsp white wine vinegar
- 1/2 cup fresh parsley (chopped)
- 1/2 tsp dried dill
- 1/4 tsp sea salt
- 1/4 tsp black pepper

Add to a large bowl and whisk or stir to combine.

PUT IT ALL TOGETHER:

- 2 cucumbers (sliced then cut in half)
- 1 fennel bulb (sliced)
- 1 shallot (sliced, or 2 Tbsp sliced onion)
- 1 bunch green onions (sliced, about one cup)
- 1/2 cup walnuts (chopped)

Add to the bowl with the dressing and toss to combine. Place in the refrigerator for 15-30 minutes to chill before serving (and to let the flavors come together).

SERVE AND ENJOY!

NUTRITION INFORMATION FOR ONE SERVING

Calories: 190
Fat: 10 g
Saturated Fat: 1.1 g
Total Carbohydrate: 20 g
Cholesterol: 1 mg
Fiber: 5 g
Sugars: 11 g
Protein: 8 g
Sodium: 190 mg

Enjoy this idea or many others on www.eatrealamerica.com. Fennel is actually an herb, but used as a vegetable. It has long stems and leaves that look like dill. The bulb is the part you eat...it's firm and crunchy and is a great addition to salads!