

## **Dill Is the 2010 Herb of the Year**

**Featured at the 71st Annual Herbs Sale of The Philadelphia Unit of the Herb Society of America**

**on Thursday, May 13th, 2010 from 10 am to 1:30pm**

One of the most common herbs in modern kitchen gardens, dill has been known for five millennia. It is believed to have originated from the Mediterranean, but today it is grown and used all around the world. Mentioned first in Egyptian documents, it was a highly prized herb in Greek, Roman, and even medieval English societies. Dill was long believed to have protective powers against witchcraft because of its strong scent, and people wore charms containing sprigs of dill for general protection. It was often added to love potions or aphrodisiacs and added to the attire or bouquet of brides for good fortune and happiness in marriage.

Every part of the dill plant has medicinal uses. It has been used for almost everything from healing wounds to keeping the congregations awake during long sermons. Its common name means “calm or sooth,” which refers to its function as a digestive aid often used to calm the stomachs of colicky infants. The culinary value of dill weed (the foliage of the plant) and dill seeds have been well known worldwide. In the food industry, they use dill for making dill pickles, baked goods, condiments, and meat products.

In the home kitchen, dill gives its flavor to soups, sauces, stews, casseroles, chicken, fish or meat dishes, pasta, and eggs. Its delicate aroma has tones of anise, parsley, and celery. The scent of dill weed is often described as a clean combination of mint, citrus, fennel and a touch of sea air. Its essential oils are also used in cosmetic products. Dill seed has more pungent aroma than dill weed with aromatic tones of caraway and anise.

Dill is an easy to grow and attractive addition to vegetable and herb gardens. Its Latin name, *Anethum Graveolens*, can be translated “a tall plant with a vigorous growth habit that has a strong smell.” It belongs to the same family or herbs (Apiaceae) as parsley, cilantro, fennel, Queen Anne’s lace, and many others. Plants in this family are ideal companion plants because they attract beneficial insects such as predatory wasps and flies, which drink the plant nectar and then prey on nearby insect pests on plants. Some of the beneficial insects attracted to dill are lacewings, ladybugs, hoverflies, tachinid flies. Dill is also attractive to caterpillars of black swallowtail butterflies as well as to the dreaded tomato hornworm that becomes the sphinx or hummingbird moth.

It is easy to grow from seeds with successive seedings throughout the season. Once flowers appear on dill, no more greenery will be produced. Keep fresh dill weed in a vase of water and use it fresh because it loses 75% of its aromatic compounds during drying. For storage, fresh dill weed can be frozen in water in ice cube trays. Seeds should be harvested as soon as they turn brown. Hang seed heads upside down in dry, well ventilated room and let seeds drop down into a tray or bag. One plant can produce 1 cup of seeds. Dill seeds are viable for 3 years.

The Philadelphia Unit of the Herb Society of America will feature Dill, the herb of the year 2010 (named by the International Herb Association), at our 71st Annual Herb Sale. This sale will be held rain or shine on May 13th, 2010 from 10 am to 1:30 pm on the green at Historic Yellow Springs on Art School Road in Chester Springs, PA. Alongside hundreds of familiar or unusual culinary and fragrant herbs, customers will find the specialty table laden with Salvias and scented Geraniums. For the lovers of old roses Ruth Flounders of Roses and Thyme from Sculps Hill will bring a selection of heritage roses. Yellow Springs Farm will present their assortment of native plants. Herb Society members will tend the large tent of homemade herbal products and garden related books and accessories. A Herbal luncheon catered by Julie Zlogar will be offered by reservation for \$15.\* There will be free lectures on Dill throughout the day.

\*To reserve luncheon, checks should be sent to HSA Philadelphia Unit, P.O. Box 1032, Kimberton, PA, 19442. Checks should be made out to HSA Phila. Unit.