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Contributed by Lin Moeller

## A DILLY of a CHOICE

You have space for only 5 herbs in your garden. What would you select? You most likely can presume from this title that one of mine would be DILL, *Anethum graveolens*. I look upon it as a 'must have' herb in any garden for a couple of reasons.

Dill is an aromatic herb. The word dill comes from Old Norse – dilla, meaning to lull. It was believed that dill water soothed the digestive system, relieved hiccups and colic, especially in babies



and children. Dill has been grown in herbal gardens since the Middle Ages. According to *The Complete Book of Herbs and Spices*,

Charlemagne decreed during his reign that dill was one of a number of herbs and spices that were to be cultivated on all imperial estates. The *physics gardens* of monasteries were other places this herb was found. It was considered a good luck symbol with Romans and signified wealth to the Greeks.

Finally, it was considered a 'magic herb' to be used against witchcraft and as an ingredient in love potions. With its soothing digestive benefits, I wonder if this is why many restaurants serve dill pickles with their sandwiches???

Its appearance is similar to its cousin *fennel* which is in the same family, Umbelliferae, though dill's distinctive scent is lacking in fennel. Rolling a bit of its greenery between finger and thumb, then whiffing, can easily identify either. As both are in the same family, both are also host plants for the swallowtail butterfly— an important reason to have it in the garden.

As I am experimenting with a potager garden this year, I have it growing next to my English cucumbers as a companion plant. It supposedly repels aphids, squash bugs and cabbage loopers. Dill is easily propagated and can be sown directly in the garden. But, beware it will easily self-sow if the flower heads are not snipped off prior to seed formation. I collect the dill seed heads and scatter them in an out-of-the-way sunny location (along with seeds of fennel and parsley) as a 'butterfly farm' for the black swallowtail butterfly. Dill can easily grow to three feet or more and quickly self-seed, taking over the herb garden – hence, clip the flower heads!



As a culinary herb, one immediately thinks 'dill pickles', but it is also found in hundreds of recipes for breads, salads, potato dishes, seafood (especially salmon), soups, stews, sauces and other vegetable side-dishes and casseroles. Collecting the leaf part, called 'dill weed' and laying it between paper towels for a few days easily and quickly dries it; then placing it in an air-tight container in the freezer keeps it fresh. By Googling 'recipes using dill' a plethora of recipes, cookbooks and other facts, lore and uses for dill will be found. I have a delicious, easy recipe for *Creamy Dill Cucumber Salad* that I am happy to share!

I grow this 'must have' herb for two primary reasons - its culinary uses and to help sustain the black swallowtail butterfly. The other four of my 5 herb choices to plant in my garden would be basil, parsley, thyme and rosemary! If I had to pick a sixth herb - it would be a difficult choice! Happy Gardening!

*(Photos courtesy of Lin Moeller)*