

Fennel

From a distance, fennel plants growing in the field look like a tall, rich, plush carpet. With a sweet, delicate anise flavor, fennel can be used much like celery in soups, salads, stir-fries, and other dishes. When used raw, its distinct taste shines through. When cooked, it imparts a subtle but delicious quality to the finished dish.

STORAGE

Cut off the stalks where they emerge from the bulb. To use the feathery foliage as an herb, place the dry stalks upright in a glass filled with two inches of water, cover the glass loosely with a plastic bag, and store in the refrigerator for up to five days. The unwashed bulb will keep in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for at least a week.

Fennel and Potato Gratin

This is a tasty variation of a traditional dish. Replace the half-and-half with whole milk for a less rich dish. *Friend of the Farm.*

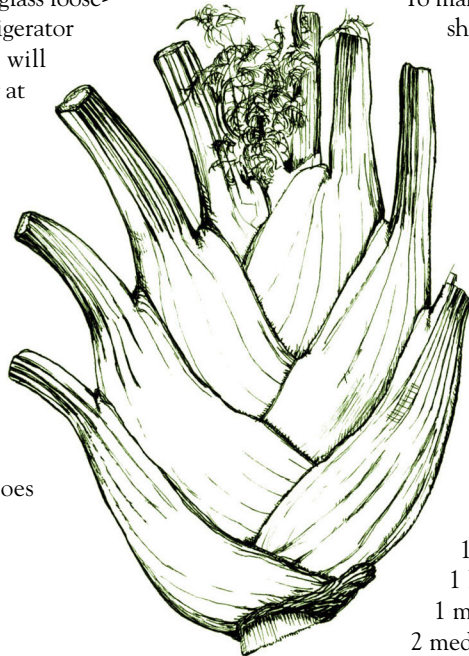
Serves 4 to 6

butter for greasing the baking dish
1 medium fennel bulb, cut crosswise into 1/8-inch slices (about 2 cups)
2 cups thinly sliced Yukon gold potatoes (about 2 large potatoes)
salt
freshly ground black pepper
2 cups half-and-half
2 tablespoons butter

1. Preheat the oven to 350° F. Lightly coat a shallow 2-quart baking dish with butter.
2. Cover the bottom of the baking dish with a layer of fennel slices. Cover with half of the potato slices. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Repeat layers until you've used up all your slices.
3. Bring the half-and-half to a gentle boil in a medium pan over medium-high heat. Pour it over the fennel and potato.
4. Using a large spatula, press down on the top layer to submerge it. Dot with butter. Bake until potatoes are tender and the top is golden, about 1 hour.

The Crop

Even though we grow fennel at Angelic Organics for its large, flattish bulbs, it would still flower and produce seeds if left in the fields long enough. Finding a fennel seedling in an unexpected place is a reminder that our vegetables live for something other than being eaten; they have their own agendas, including reproducing and completing a life cycle.



HANDLING

Remove any damaged spots or layers. Cut the bulb in half lengthwise and check the inner core. If it's tough, remove it with a paring knife. Fennel should be washed carefully, because dirt can lodge between the layers of the bulb. Chop or mince the leaves.

Rich Summer Fennel Soup

This hearty soup makes for a meal on its own, and it's even better the next day for lunch, though the farm crew seldom leaves any behind.

To make your tomatoes virtually peel themselves, score a very shallow X on the bottom of each one, put them in a heat-proof bowl or measuring cup, and pour boiling water over them. Leave them in the boiling water for a minute or so if necessary; the peel will loosen completely. *Angelic Organics Kitchen.*

Serves 3

Bouquet Garni:

1 sprig parsley, stem only
1 bay leaf
1 sprig thyme

Soup:

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 medium onion, sliced
1 to 2 cloves garlic, crushed
1 medium or large fennel bulb, roughly chopped
1 large carrot, chopped
1 medium potato, peeled, cubed
2 medium tomatoes, peeled, seeded, chopped
3 cups vegetable or chicken stock
2 tablespoons Pernod (licorice-flavored liqueur) (optional)
1/4 cup heavy cream or silken tofu
salt
white pepper
chopped parsley

1. To prepare the bouquet garni, tie together the parsley stem, bay leaf, and thyme sprig in a piece of cheesecloth.
2. Heat the butter and oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion; sauté for 1 minute. Add the garlic and sauté for 1 minute more.
3. Stir in the fennel, carrot, and potato and cook for 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes, stock, and bouquet garni. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to a simmer. Cover and cook over low heat until the fennel is very soft, about 30 minutes.
4. Discard the bouquet garni. Let the mixture cool slightly and then purée it in batches in a food processor or blender. (If you are using tofu instead of cream, add it now and purée with the rest of the ingredients.)
5. Return the soup to the pot and stir in the Pernod and cream. Heat over medium-low heat to allow the soup to heat through, but do not boil. Season with salt and white pepper to taste. Garnish with parsley.

Excerpted from *Farmer John's Cookbook: The Real Dirt On Vegetables: Seasonal Recipes and Stories from a Community Supported Farm* by Farmer John Peterson & Angelic Organics (Gibbs Smith Publisher). Check with your local farm or bookstore for availability. Additional recipes, charts, individual copies of this book, and quantity discounts available at www.AngelicOrganics.com/cookbook.

