

The East London Garden Society

Plant Facts

Black Cumin



It is possible to grow Nigella species indoors first. It is best to grow them in peat pots and allow seven weeks or so before transplanting them in the garden in spring or autumn at about 25 cm apart.

It is easy to look after Black Cumin and other Nigella; water during very dry spells supply fertiliser and if you are not growing black cumin for its seeds then deadhead the flowers for further blooms and to stop them spreading.

More than 650 studies have looked into the potential health benefits of 'black seed' which come from the flowering plant Nigella Sativa. Revered since ancient times for its versatile medicinal qualities, black seed oil was found in Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun's tomb. Black seed, which is also known as black cumin, black caraway, black sesame, onion seed and Roman coriander, has a long history of use in traditional systems of medicine, including Ayurveda and Siddha.

Black cumin has even been described as a miracle herb and its name in old Latin is *Panacea* meaning *cure all*. Traditionally, black cumin has been used for immune system support, wellbeing, digestive health, respiratory issues, kidney and liver support and heart health. In Asia and the Middle East, black cumin seeds have long been used to treat asthma, bronchitis, rheumatism and other inflammatory diseases.

A tincture of the seeds has traditionally been used to treat indigestion, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, parasitic infections and skin problems. An external application of black cumin oil has even been used as an antiseptic and roasted seeds as a treatment to stop vomiting.

The most abundant active plant chemical in black cumin is thymoquinone; other bioactive compounds in the seed include α -hederin, alkaloids, flavonoids, antioxidants and fatty acids.

Some countries, such as China, value black cumin seeds for their purported anti-aging benefits, and they are rich in B vitamins and iron, deficiencies of which have been linked to memory problems, hearing trouble and even grey hair.

Black cumin oil is available in supplement form, but you can easily add the seeds to your regular meals. It is popular in North Indian, Pakistani, and Iranian cuisines, with a warm, slightly bitter flavour that tastes something like a blend of thyme, oregano and nutmeg.

You can add the seeds to casseroles, stir fries, salad dressings and baked goods, sprinkle them on salads, or even add them to your coffee or tea. Black cumin tea can be made by pouring about one tablespoon of hot water over the seeds and letting it steep for ten minutes.

Aside from their culinary uses, a mixture of black cumin, honey and garlic makes a powerful tonic for soothing coughs and boosting immunity, especially during the cold and flu season or if you feel like you are coming down with an infection. Black cumin oil can even be used topically to treat psoriasis and eczema or mixed with facial cream to moisturize and soothe your skin.