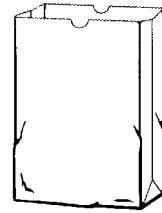


IN THE BAG
Special supplement
Thursday, July 8, 2004



Fennel -- This feathery food is completely normal in Italy, but many of us are unfamiliar with it here. Pale green, with stems like celery and a flat bulb for a base, it takes a bit like licorice and anise, but not so strong. Fennel stalks don't store well; they dry out quickly and lose their flavor, so cut the stalks from their base and wrap them separately in plastic, and put them in the coldest part of the refrigerator.

Use fennel stems like celery, to flavor soups and stews; use the feathery leaves like dill. The bulb is the main attraction.

From Schneider's Uncommon Fruits and Vegetables:

- Slice fennel bulb very finely and dress with lemon juice, olive oil, chives for a delicious salad.
- Blanched fennel slices absorb and flavor a vinaigrette.
- Parboiled fennel slices, ½ inch thick, can be dipped in beaten egg, then fine crumbs, and fried in "shallow fat for a memorable appetizer."
- Stir fry or sauté fennel slivers. Cook with shallots, garlic, leeks, mushrooms, red peppers, or julienned summer squash for a fast and interesting side dish.
- Use fennel in vegetable soups, or combine with leeks and potatoes for a puree, with or without cream.
- Fennel goes well with seafood – fish or shrimp or scallops or squid!

Sautéed Fennel with Lemon

One fennel bulb
2 T. olive oil or butter
salt and pepper to taste
½ tsp. lemon zest, grated finely

Trim and save the fennel leaves. Quarter the bulb lengthwise, cut each quarter crosswise in very thin slivers. Mince 1 tablespoon of the fine leaves.

Heat oil in heavy skillet, toss fennel slices to coat. Add salt. Continue tossing frequently over moderate heat until tender, about ten minutes. Toss with lemon zest and pepper. Sprinkle with minced tops.

Tomatillos – Looks like a green cherry tomato in a paper husk. Also called a Mexican green tomato, Mexican husk tomato, Tomate Verde. You peel the parchment cover off and wash the little tomato well. Tomatillos are most often cooked in salsa. They have a lemony flavor. If you eat them raw, they are more sharply acidic. They can be stored in the refrigerator for a very long time.

You can try them chopped in salad, in gazpacho, or you can cook them into a sauce for tacos and enchiladas. Poach the peeled and washed tomatillos very briefly, then combine with chili peppers, onion, garlic, cilantro and salt.

Tomatillo, Dried Chili and Cilantro Sauce

This sauce can be combined with browned pieces of chicken or any meat, or with large fish fillets, and then braised gently.

2 large, dried New Mexico chilies
1 cup boiling water
 $\frac{3}{4}$ pound fresh tomatillos, husked and rinsed
2 very large garlic cloves, sliced
1 bunch cilantro

Stem and seed chilies, break up pods. Combine in a saucepan with the boiling water, let stand for 15 minutes.

Add tomatillos and garlic to saucepan. Chop cilantro stems and add to pan.

Simmer, then lower heat and cook, covered, until tomatillos are soft, turning them occasionally. Transfer to blender or food processor.

Add cilantro leaves, make a coarse puree. Cool completely.

Kentucky Wonder Beans – Don't be scared by the size of these beans. They are tender and tasty. They are supposed to be flat and long and they are not chewy. Steam them until dark green, but not mushy. Delicious with a little lime juice and garlic, or just with butter and salt. We will be eating green beans all summer long. Tony Newcomb used to call them the "perfect food." Our kids eat beans raw just as often as cooked. We eat them as cold leftovers, with salad dressing.