FENNEL

Health Benefits:

Fennel is crunchy and slightly sweet, adding a refreshing contribution to the ever popular Mediterranean cuisine. Fennel has repeatedly been shown to reduce inflammation and to help prevent the occurrence of cancer. As a very good source of [fiber](http://www.whfoods.com/genpage.php?tname=nutrient&dbid=59), fennel bulb may help to reduce elevated cholesterol levels. Fennel is an excellent source of vitamin C. It is also a very good of dietary fiber, potassium, manganese, folate, and molybdenum. In addition, fennel is a good source of niacin as well as the minerals phosphorus, calcium, magnesium, iron, and copper.

Preparation:

The three different parts of fennel-the base, stalks and leaves-can all be used in cooking. Cut the stalks away from the bulb at the place where they meet. If you are not going to be using the intact bulb in a recipe, then first cut it in half, remove the base, and then rinse it with water before proceeding to cut it further. Fennel can be cut in a variety of sizes and shapes, depending upon the recipe and your personal preference. The best way to slice it is to do so vertically through the bulb. If your recipe requires chunked, diced or julienned fennel, it is best to first remove the harder core that resides in the center before cutting it. The stalks of the fennel can be used for soups, stocks and stews, while the leaves can be used as an herb seasoning.

Try substituting fennel for celery in almost any recipes.

Fennel can be baked, steamed, or sautéed. Try cutting fennel into quarters, drizzle with olive oil, and bake until tender, about 35 minutes.

Try a sauté of fennel, artichokes, zucchini, tomatoes, peppers, thyme, and a dash of salt and pepper. Steam fennel and chill it along with other vegetables. Cut raw fennel into slices and use for dipping. Use the leaves as a fresh herb for seasoning.

Storage:

Store fennel in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks. The delicate leaves will go limp. Wrap them in a moist towel and refrigerate. While fresh fennel can be frozen after first being blanched, it seems to lose much of its flavor during this process.

Recipes:

Braised Fennel

* 3 tbsp butter
* 1/2 cup chopped onion
* Seeds from 2 cardamom pods, crushed
* 1 tsp pepper
* 2 medium fennel bulbs, cut lengthwise into 6 pieces
* 1 1/4 cups chicken or vegetable stock
* Salt to taste

1. Heat oven to 350 degrees. Melt butter in heavy, ovenproof skillet over low heat. Add onion, cardamom, and pepper; sauté 8 minutes.
2. Add fennel and toss to coat. Stir in stock, bring to a boil, cover, and braise in the oven for 30 minutes, basting occasionally.
3. Place skillet over high heat and boil until liquid thickens slightly, about 15 minutes. Season with salt. Makes 4 servings

Zucchini, Fennel Pie

* 1/2 tbsp butter, softened
* 3 tbsp bread crumbs
* 1 tbsp olive oil
* 3/4 cup diced onion
* 3/4 cup diced fennel bulb
* 1 tsp minced garlic
* 2 cups diced zucchini
* 1/2 tsp crushed fennel seed
* Salt and pepper
* 3-4 oz Swiss cheese
* 3 eggs
* 1/2 cup milk

For garnish; try diced red pepper, chopped black olives, other colorful vegetables, or chopped fennel leaves

1. Heat oven to 350 degrees. Generously grease a pie plate with butter. Sprinkle bread crumbs over buttered areas.
2. Heat olive oil in a skillet over medium flame. Add onion, fennel, and garlic; sauté until vegetables are partially tender, about 5 minutes.
3. Raise heat to medium-high; stir in zucchini, fennel seed, and salt and pepper to taste. Sauté until zucchini is tender, 3-5 minutes.
4. Spread mixture on platter; cool 10 minutes. Meanwhile, grate cheese; sprinkle two-thirds of it into a pie pan.
5. Beat eggs with milk in bowl. Stir cooled vegetable mixture into egg mixture; pour into pan. Sprinkle remaining cheese on top. Rim outer edge of pie filling with garnish choice.
6. Bake until set, about 30 minutes. Cool 10 minutes before serving. Makes 6-8 servings.

Try adding in sausage, chicken, or tofu/tempeh.