

Common Name: **Black Cumin**

Genus: *Nigella*

Species: *sativa*

Family: Ranunculacea

AKA: Fennel Flower, Roman Coriander, Nutmeg Flower, Gith, St. Katherine's Flower

Historical Uses:



Medical: “The seed of nigella drunke with wine, is a remedy against the shortness of breath, dissolveth and putteth forth windinesse, provoketh urine, the menses, increatheth milke in the breasts of nurses if it be drunke moderately; otherwise it is not only hurtfull to them, but to any that take thereof too often, or in too great quantity.

The seed killeth and driveth forth wormes, whether it be taken in wine or water, or laid to navel in manner of a plaister. The oile that is drawne forth thereof hath the same property. It takes away freckles, scurfs, and hard swellings, being laid on mixed with vinegar. To be briefe, as *Galen* saith, it is most excellent remedy where there is need of clensing, drying, and heating.”(1)

Culinary: Seeds used as a substitute for pepper.(2) “Let a person who wants to eat cooked or dry cheese without suffering any pain put cumin on it and then eat it. Let whoever suffers nausea take cumin and pulverize it with a third as much cumin and a quarter as much pimperl. And mix these with pure wheat flour. Add egg yoke and a little water, and make into a paste from these ingredients. Bake in a warm oven or under warm ashes. Then eat these biscuits.”(3)



Household: “It serveth well among other sweets to put into sweet waters, bagges, and odoriferous powders.”(4)

Folklore/Astrology: Hot and dry in the third degree.(5)

Other: The name nigella is derived from the Latin *niger* meaning black, and refers to the black seeds of this plant.



Contemporary Uses:

Parts Used: Oil, seeds

Medicinal: An aromatic, laxative herb that stimulates the uterus, increases lactation, benefits digestion, reduces inflammation, and expels intestinal worms. Used internally for painful menstruation, postpartum contractions, insufficient lactation, poor appetite, fevers, and worms. Used externally for abscesses, hemorrhoids, skin diseases, and orchitis.(6)



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Close-up of the nigella flower

Culinary: Seeds used as seasonings in stews, casseroles, and lentil dishes. In Egypt and Middle East, seeds are sprinkled on cakes, pastries and breads. In Syria, cheese is mixed with black cumin seeds.(7)



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Close-up of the nigella seed pod

Area of Origin: Western Asia

Physical description: Erect with branched stems, leaves deeply divided

Plant type: Annual

Height: 6"-12"

Flower color: Small pale blue tinged to white flowers

Flowering period: Summer

Soil type/requirements: Light garden loam

Ph: 5.6 to 8.2

Fruit: Seed pod

Hardiness zone: USDA

Sun requirements: Full sun

Propagation: By seed in autumn or spring

Sources

1. Gerard, p. 1085-1086
2. Anderson, p. 207
3. Von Bingen, p. 22-23
4. Gerard, p. 1085-1086
5. Ibid.
6. Herb Society of America, p. 289

7. Book of Herbs, p. 392-393

Illustrations/Images:

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| 1. Gerard's Herbal | 1633 |
| 2. PSUMG | 2012 |
| 3. PSUMG | 2012 |
| 4. PSUMG | 2012 |