

Carum carvi

[Synonyms : *Apium carvi*, *Bunium carum*, *Bunium carvi*, *Carum carvi* var. *gracile*, *Carum gracile*, *Carum officinale*, *Carum rosellum*, *Carum velenovskyi*, *Foeniculum carvi*, *Ligusticum carvi*, *Seseli carvi*]

CARAWAY is a biennial or perennial. Native to Asia, central Europe and the Middle East, it has tiny white or yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Alcaravea* (Spanish), *Alcarávia* (Portuguese), Ammi, *Anis des Vosges* (French), Black cumin, *Brödkummin* (Swedish), *Carvi* (French), Caraway fruit, Caraway seed, Caroy, *Carvi* (French, Italian), *Carwy* (Welsh), *Chaman* (Armenian), *Cominho* (Portuguese), *Comino* (Italian), *Comino de prado* (Spanish), *Comino tedesco* (Italian), Common caraway, *Cravya tarbutit* (Hebrew), Cumin, *Cumin de montagne* (French), *Cumin des prés* (French), *Cumino* (Italian), *Cumino dei prati* (Italian), *Cumino tedesco* (Italian), *Dikii anis* (Ukrainian), *Echter Kümmel* (German), *Faux anis* (French), *Faux cumin* (French, Moroccan), *Feldkümmel* (German), *Frenk kimyonu* (Turkish), *Ge lü zi* (Chinese), *Gunyun* (Kashmiri), *Hakiki kimyon* (Turkish), *Hanlik köömen* (Estonian), *Hime uikyou* (Japanese), *Hinojo de prado* (Spanish), *Jintan* (Indonesian, Malay), *Jira* (Bengali), *Kaalaa jiiraa* (Hindi), *Kaerowei* (Korean), *Kalu duru* (Sindhi), *Kammûn armanî* (Arabic), *Karaman* (Turkish), *Karaman kimyonu* (Turkish), *Karawyâ* (Arabic), *Karavi* (Sanskrit), *Karawyâ* (Arabic, Egyptian), *Karo* (Greek), *Karoya* (Persian), *Karve* (Danish, Norwegian), *Karven* (Swedish), *Karvi* (Greek), *Karvio* (Esperanto), *Karwij* (Dutch), *Kharawjâ* (Persian), *Kim* (Bulgarian, Croatian, Serbian), *Kimel* (Hebrew), *Kisibiti* (Swahili), *Kmin* (Czech, Ukrainian), *Kminek* (Polish), *Kminek zwyczajny* (Polish), *Kmín kořenný* (Czech), *Kmín luční* (Czech), *Kmyn zvichainii* (Ukrainian), *Kömény* (Hungarian), *Kommel* (Swedish), *Kommen* (Danish, Swedish), *Kravyah* (Hebrew), *Kúmen* (Icelandic), *Kumin* (Swedish), *Kumina* (Finnish, Slovenian), *Kummel* (Dutch, French), *Kümmel* (German), *Kummil* (Swedish), *Kummin* (Swedish), *Kumming* (Swedish), *Kyarauei* (Japanese), *Mattenkümmel* (German), Meeting seed, *Navadna kumina* (Slovenian), *Rasca lúčna* (Slovakian), Roman cumin, *Saksan kumina* (Finnish), *Shah jira* (Hindi), *Shia-jira* (Hindi), *Shimaisapu* (Telugu), *Shimai-shembu* (Tamil), *Shima jirakam* (Malayalam), *Shime jeerige* (Kannada), *Sima jirakaia* (Telugu), *Sushavi* (Sanskrit), *Tavallinen kumina* (Finnish), *Thiam takap* (Thai), *Tmin* (Russian), *Tmin obyknovennyi* (Russian), *Vilayaatii jeeraa* (Hindi), *Vild kommen* (Danish), *Wiesen-Kümmel* (German), *Wilayati zirah* (Marathi), *Wilde komijn* (Dutch), *Yuan-sui* (Chinese), and *Zira-siah* (Punjabi, Urdu).

The darkest seed is to be found in northern Europe, and the Netherlands is believed to produce the best quality.

Oil is extracted from the seeds.

Warning – handling the plant can make the skin sensitive to sunlight.

Caraway flowers and seeds have a resemblance to those of hemlock (*Conium maculatum*).

Carvi is an old name for caraway (*Carum carvi*).

Caraway has been used primarily as food or flavouring for at least 5,000 years. Remains have been found by archaeologists in the excavations of the Swiss lake villages at Robenhausen that date back to about 8000 BC.

In India today caraway seeds (whole or ground) continue to maintain their reputation, held for thousands of years, as a digestive aid and they are still often served as such at the end of a meal.

During Roman times caraway was being used in Gaul to flavour sausages. The root was also eaten by the Romans as a vegetable, and in later centuries throughout Europe (including Britain) the seeds were added to bread and cakes as both an ingredient and decoration. The root continued to be eaten as a vegetable and John Parkinson (1567-1650) a London herbalist who was apothecary to James VI and I of Scotland and England respectively, claimed that the young roots had a better flavour than those of parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) – as do some authorities still today.

In England the 16th Century Elizabethans also flavoured roasted apples (*Malus*) with the seeds, and until the late 1800s Trinity College, Cambridge perpetuated their custom of providing a small dish of caraway seeds to accompany roast apples, as also some of the traditional London Livery Companies. Another long-standing custom that used to be practised by English farmers was that of serving caraway-seed cake to all the farmhands when the wheat had been sown.

Germany, Norway and Sweden all flavoured bread with caraway, and the Germans also added it to cabbage (*Brassica oleracea* var. *capitata*), soups and cheese. It has always been popular in Germany and with Prince Albert's (1819-1861) marriage to the English Queen Victoria in 1840 the plant gained renewed interest in Britain where for a time it had been out of fashion. According to at least one authority however caraway's popularity in Austria surpassed (and may still do so) that of any of her Continental neighbours. A flavouring of the seeds was (possibly is) added to what sometimes seemed to be everything.

Some records suggest that caraway became familiar to a few Indian tribes in North America. It would seem that the seeds might have been a staple constituent of the diet of some of the Cree Indians. They are said to have ground them for flour and used them as a flavouring. They are also said to have given them to children as a calming agent, and the Abnaki tribe are believed to have prescribed caraway for pain relief. Iroquois Indians are held to have fed the underground stems to their pigs as it was thought to make the animals stronger.

Caraway did serve other purposes however. In Persia in the 6th Century it had become so highly prized that it was accepted in payment of taxes.

It has also been used in the past in cosmetics, as an ingredient in soaps and creams to combat wrinkles and rough skin, and when taken as a cordial it was viewed as a muscle tonic.

In days gone by the plant was considered to be a protection against witches, and for this reason in Germany a dish of caraway was placed under a baby's cradle. It was also thought to be able to prevent the loss of a loved one and was often an ingredient in love potions. This ability to prevent loss was taken several stages further however. For many people any object containing caraway would never go missing and burglaries were impossible if caraway was present as it spread its protection to the whole house.

Birds and poultry were not left out. Seeds added to their food were said to be adequate assurance that pigeons, (and chickens too) would not flee the sanctuary of their home. Even today a piece of caraway dough in the dovecote or the racing pigeon's loft is said to be infallible. The seed cake remaining after oil extraction has been fed to cattle.

Veterinary medicine has also made use of caraway. In the early part of the 20th Century it could be found as an ingredient in a remedy for treating mange in dogs. While in Malaysia it is said to have been used for worming elephants.

Today the seeds' essential oil (often referred to as *Oleum carvi*) is used commercially by the food industry eg. in confectionery, the dry seeds provide a garnish for breads and

cheeses, a flavouring for curries and a seasoning for meat. The drinks industry uses caraway eg. liqueurs, especially Kümmel. In agriculture it is used as a poultry feed. Caraway is also used in perfumes, in toiletries eg. soaps and in mouthwashes, and for the pharmaceutical industry it is an ingredient in creams, ointments and proprietary medicines.

Medicinally, it has always been valued for treating digestive disorders and hysteria, both remedies making use of its carminative properties, and in the past caraway was also added to a poultice that was applied to ease bruising.