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Horticulture News

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Trying new things to grow is one of the fun things about having a garden! Fennel is a close relative of dill, carrots, and parsley. Many gardeners are most familiar with growing fennel as an herb for the foliage, flowers, or seeds. Bulbing fennel, also called Florence fennel or finocchio, produces a large, swollen stem at the base of the plant that is eaten as a vegetable.

Variety considerations. Most herb varieties will perform well in Kansas. For the vegetable types, look for varieties that are fast maturing and bolt resistant.

When to plant. Sow seeds in mid-March to early April for a spring crop or late July to early August for a fall crop. The bulbing types will thrive only in cooler periods of the year. Fennel can also be started from seed indoors and transplanted, although the seedlings can be delicate and tricky to transplant.

Spacing. Plant seeds 2 to 3 inches apart and thin to a plant every 4 to 6 inches for best results. Rows can be 12 to 15 inches apart for vegetable types. Foliage types grown for seed can get much taller and may need to be spaced further apart.

Crop rotation. If possible in your garden space, do not plant in the same areas where dill, fennel, carrots, or parsley have been planted in the past 3 to 4 years.

Care. Once established, fennel plants are fairly drought tolerant. However, too much heat or drought stress for bulbing types will result in the plant flowering and losing quality of the bulbs. Fennel will tolerate light frost if planted for a fall crop.

Harvesting. Fennel foliage can be harvested at any time during the growing season. Fennel seed should be harvested after it has turned brown and then dried completely before storage.

Fennel bulbs can be harvested at any size but are at peak quality when they are about 3 inches across. Bulbs larger than 4 inches may be of lower quality. Bulbs on plants that have bolted (flowered) will be woody and poorly flavored. Cut the plant below the bulb, at the soil line to harvest the bulbs. Trim the tops near the bulb and store in plastic bags in the refrigerator for several weeks.