

Herb of the Month: Dill

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Dill contains some natural chemicals which, in test tubes, kill bacteria and cancer and act as anti-oxidants. Relatively large amounts of a dill extract in laboratory rats lowers triglycerides (fat in blood) and cholesterol. Dill seed extracts cut stomach acidity in mice, and some believe dill helps with digestive problems. So far health claims come from animal studies and herbal medicine lore, without human scientific verification.

The plant (seeds and leaves) contain numerous vitamins and minerals. If you eat 100 grams of dill (about a cup and a half of dried seed), you've gotten quite a bit of nutrition. But who has the stomach for that much dill?

Dill's common side effect is skin rash. It is one of the plants that sensitizes the skin to sunlight, inducing what can be a painful and ugly rash upon sun exposure. The chemicals that do this are the furocoumarins, common in many plants.

In Mediterranean and West Asian countries people use dill leaves in salads and tea. In the U.S. we use mostly the seed as a spice. It would be hard to eat enough dill to see health benefits, but it is healthier than loads of salt and adds interesting flavor.