

FLAVOURS & AROMAS

Coriander and dill are easy-to-grow herbs that can be raised both for attractive, tasty leaves and for seeds. Now, following a recent RHS Plant Trial, there are some selections with the Award of Garden Merit (AGM)

Author: **Barbara Segall**, Editor of *Herbs* magazine, and a member of the RHS Herb Advisory Group. Photography: **Tim Sandall**

Coriander is a herb that makes a positive or negative impression on taste buds: we either like it or loathe it. Its growth habits are infuriating, since it 'bolts' to flower and seed in high summer temperatures and dry soils.

In seed catalogues, many cultivars of annual coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*) described as 'slow to bolt' are worth trying, but if you want to have fresh foliage over a long growing season (June to September), sow seed in small quantities, successionaly.

When the plants do go to seed, this should still be embraced as, once

dried then crushed, the seed is useful and aromatic. Treat coriander as a short, quick-to-harvest crop.

Ornamental in the garden in its own right, dill (*Anethum graveolens*) has a cleansing flavour of spicy aniseed. As with coriander, dill is useful for its foliage and its seeds. Many seed companies differentiate between leaf and seed dill. However, they will all produce aromatic seeds.

Leaf production is what most gardeners (and cooks) focus on. Over the past three decades, coriander has risen from being almost unheard-of in UK gardens and kitchens to one of the most popular fresh herbs – sales

of coriander make up more than 25 percent of the fresh herb market.

Coriander and dill need similar conditions, and both featured in a recent RHS Plant Trial at RHS Garden Wisley, Surrey, where some cultivars were assessed for the RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM).

Coriander

A staple herb of Asian and Mexican cuisines, coriander has spicy foliage, delicate flowers, aromatic seeds and well-established roots that offer different types of flavour. Its peppery, parsley-shaped leaves have serrated edges and are quick to wilt when harvested, so pick the amount needed and use them right away. The leaves can be used fresh in salads, or added at the end of cooking in hot dishes, to ensure an intense flavour.

Coriander's small white or purplish flowers can also provide colour and flavour to salads, while the crushed seeds offer aroma to cooked dishes as well as chutneys. Its fibrous and sweet-tasting roots are often used in Thai cuisine.

Coriander is a tender annual but, in warmer areas, autumn sowings can survive under protection, reaching around 60–70cm (24–28in) tall.

Plants fare best in well-drained soil on a sunny site with some shade. Sow seed in spring into shallow rows in the soil, cover with compost and

water in. Germination takes a week to 10 days. Depending on whether you are growing to produce foliage or seeds, thin the plants to 5cm (2in) for leaf, 26cm (10in) apart for seeds.

Keep young plants weed-free and well watered until established. In hot, dry conditions, watering is crucial – a good soaking early in the day is best.

Pick the young leaves before the mature ferny ones develop. Sow seed every 10 days or so to maintain leaf production, making the last sowing in September if you are in an area with milder winters.

As plants mature, the foliage changes and becomes finely cut, almost dill-like. At this stage, the foliage is not as pungent for culinary uses and flowers will soon appear. Once the plants flower, allow them to set seed and let the seed ripen on the plants before harvesting and drying it for later culinary use.

Coriander's aromatic properties protect it from pests, but if greenfly do appear, wash any infestation off when you pick the leaves. If slugs are a problem, protect seedlings with barriers, traps or with non-chemical nematode applications. Flea beetle damage to foliage looks unsightly, especially if you plan to use coriander as a garnish, but it will not affect the taste if you are using it in cooked dishes. The best policy would be to make another sowing.

Dill

A hardy annual, dill grows to 60–150cm (2–5ft), depending on cultivar, with aromatic feathery leaves and clusters of yellow flowers in midsummer. It grows best in well-drained, gritty soil in a sheltered but sunny position. Sow direct into shallow drills as soon as the soil has warmed up in spring. Again, as for coriander, successional sowings every few weeks will provide dill leaf over a long growing season.

Water seedlings and thin out to 20cm (8in). If necessary, support plants with a light framework of hazel twigs. Water regularly in dry seasons or plants will bolt into flower, leaving a minimal leaf harvest. Protect young plants from slugs. Pick leaves as you need them when they are fresh and young, and the seed when ripening. For culinary use, it is best to harvest seed before it ripens completely on the plant.

Once dill has gone to flower, keep an eye on the ripening seedheads to make your seed harvest. Cut off spent flowerheads and place them in paper bags. Leave to ripen in a warm, dry site. When dried, clean the husks off and store in airtight jars, ready for use. Dill self-seeds freely so keep picking those seedheads, unless you want a dill forest next spring. ●

More from the RHS For information and advice, search 'Coriander' and 'Dill' at www.rhs.org.uk



The size and similar growing requirements of coriander and dill enable them to be combined well in the garden.

AGM plants



A trial of 11 coriander cultivars and 15 dill cultivars was held at RHS Garden Wisley, Surrey and judged by the RHS Herb Trials Assessment Forum in 2014; four corianders and five dills received the RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM). Plants were judged for uniformity, yield, holding ability, appearance, and resistance to pests and diseases. Another coriander was awarded an AGM subject to naming and availability. Coriander and dill have RHS hardiness rating H2 (1–5°C / 34–41°F).

Coriander

❖ **'Calypso' 1:** showed vigorous, bushy strong growth. Displayed good leaf yield. Suppliers: **A, B, C.**

❖ **'Confetti' 2:** had a distinct look with attractive fern-like foliage. Ideal for home gardeners, showing neat and uniform plants. Suppliers: **C, D, E.**

❖ **'Filtro' 3:** displayed good growth and uniform germination. It grew consistently, had a high yield and was a good size for home gardens. Suppliers: **F.**

❖ **'Cruiser':** new in 2014; it was a compact plant with big leaves, and good germination. Suppliers: **H.**



Dill

❖ **'Hera':** had good germination; dark upright foliage on tall, uniform plants, with thick stems. Suppliers: **F.**

❖ **'Domino':** displayed well-defined, pleasing, open leaflets. Produced a high yield. Suppliers: **G.**

❖ **'Annette':** showed good vigour, producing uniform and compact plants with a high yield of attractive fern-like foliage. Limited availability.

❖ **'Moulton':** had uniform plants with dark leaves. Displayed an attractive featheriness on the stems of germinating seedlings. Limited availability.

❖ **'Desire':** produced compact plants with pale foliage. Combined fresh flavour, fine leaflets and good vigour. Suppliers: **H.**



Suppliers include:

- A Thompson & Morgan:** 0844 573 1818; www.thompson-morgan.com
- B Marshalls:** 0844 557 6700; www.marshalls-seeds.co.uk
- C Unwins:** 0844 573 8400; www.unwins.co.uk
- D Dobies:** 0844 701 7625; www.dobies.co.uk
- E DT Brown:** 0845 371 0532; www.dtbrownseeds.co.uk
- F Tuckers:** 01364 652233; www.edwintucker.co.uk
- G Simpson's:** 01985 845004; www.simpsonsseeds.co.uk
- H CN Seeds:** 01353 699413; www.cnseeds.co.uk

Dill is not just productive; it has equal merit when used for ornament and decoration.

