

# Does your Heart Belong To Fennel ?



by Pamela Manley

**‘...the symbol of the heart’**

I have a confession to use for fennel until I As one of the lesser-vegetables, fennel has But once you start to experiment with this member of the parsley family, you might just be pleasantly surprised.

make. I never really found a started working in restaurants. known and rarely understood received a little bit of bad press.

Originating in the Mediterranean, fennel came to its highest popularity in Roman times. It was widely used for medicinal purposes and promoted as an appetite suppressant. I can see it now. A man dressed in a toga and sandals saying, “Get rid of your fat with Fennel!” Ok, maybe not.

Yet, despite fennel’s glorious past fame and place in history, I still had to admit that I did not care for it. That was until I began cooking with fennel. The sweet licorice flavor of the root vegetable adds a nice curb to foods that may be pungent or acidic. For instance, I was privileged to prepare the Fennel Marinara at a local restaurant.

But the bulbous root and stems did hold a special place in history. It has been reported that a now extinct and giant species of fennel, *Silphium*, which grew in Northern Africa during ancient

My first thoughts were, ‘licorice flavored tomato sauce’. Ick! (This was immediately followed by a tightly contorted face demonstrating my displeasure at the thought.) But it was my job to prepare the sauce, so I did it. As I began my mise en place, I was still hesitant. Then, as I began to put the ingredients together, I noticed a lovely aroma coming from the saucepan...

times, is the origin of the symbol that greeting card



companies publicize around February fourteenth – the symbol of the heart. Historical records have found coins from that Northern region of Africa – Cyrene – that display the seed pod of this giant fennel.<sup>1</sup>

The combination of the garlic, herbs and fennel came together for an unexpected symphony for the olfactory. Once the tomatoes were added, sweet notes could be detected. Not sweet in a sugary sense, but almost a floral tone.

## Fennel Marinara

by Chef Dann Reid  
Andrew’s 228

- 1 fennel bulb -- small dice (incl. stems)
- 10 cloves garlic -- thin slice
- 1 white onion -- small dice
- 1/2 cup basil leaves – chiffonade
- 1 T fennel seed
- 4 oz. tomato paste
- 7 lbs. tomatoes, crushed
- 8 oz extra virgin olive oil
- 1 T thyme – chopped

Sweat fennel, onion, basil, garlic and fennel seeds in the cup of oil.

Add tomato paste. Cook 3-4 minutes while stirring.

Add thyme and tomatoes. Cook until tomatoes break apart (about 30-45 minutes).

Lightly puree the mixture with a hand blender/burr mixer.

Per Serving (excluding unknown items): 145 Calories; 12g Fat (68.3% calories from fat); 2g Protein; 10g Carbohydrate; 3g Dietary Fiber; 0mg Cholesterol; 287mg Sodium. Exchanges: 0 Grain(Starch); 0 Lean Meat; 1 1/2 Vegetable; 2 1/2 Fat.

But the use of fennel as a food did take a back seat to its purported medicinal qualities. Aside from the appetite curbing quality, many ancient philosophers, including Pliny, reported at length on the healing qualities of fennel. One of the most popular ailments it was reported to help was poor eyesight. Pliny wrote that fennel 'quickenened the sight' of snakes.<sup>ii</sup> History does not report exactly how he came to this conclusion.

For Roman Gladiators, fennel was the ultimate protein powder. Prior to a match, they would mix fennel into their meal believing that it would make them stronger. And if the Gladiator was fortunate enough to win the match, he was crowned with circlet of fennel.

Given fennel's association with strength, winning and sportsmanship, it was appropriate that the historic battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. It was during this skirmish that an athlete ran 150 miles to Sparta for reinforcements. Thus the derived meaning for the word 'marathon'.<sup>iii</sup> And fennel was there for it all!

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.heartsmith.com/heartHistory.html>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.spice-box.com/mall/fennel.asp>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.spice-box.com/mall/fennel.asp>

## Fennel Facts\*

As a member of the Parsley family, Fennel has a quirky attraction...



- The leaves of the Fennel bulb contain a more concentrated flavor than the bulb.
- Fennel is a source of dietary fiber.
- Fennel can grow as high as three to five feet.\*\*
- Fennel seeds are not seeds at all. They are the dried fruit of the *Foeniculum Vulgare Mill* (the fancy name for fennel)
- There are two varieties of fennel: \*\*\*  
*Florence*: The bulblike version  
*Common*: A stalk-like version that produces the 'seeds'
- In medieval times, fennel was part of a witches brew used to ward off evil spirits.\*\*
- Fennel is rich in Vitamin C and iron and the tops are rich in Vitamin A!

\* From <http://www.fandvforme.com/fandv/fen.htm> unless otherwise noted.

\*\* From <http://www.spice-box.com/mall/fennel.asp>

\*\*\* From <http://eat.epicurious.com/dictionary/food/index.ssf?TERM=fennel>



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