



CARAWAY

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Caraway (*Carum carvi* L.) is a hardy, biennial herb which is native to Europe and Western Asia. First year plants resemble carrots, growing to about 8 inches tall with finely divided leaves and long taproots. By the second year, two to three foot stalks develop topped by umbels of white or pink flowers, which appear from May to August. Some varieties may flower the first year. The seeds are small, brown and crescent shaped.

Planting— Caraway grows best in full sun, in a well-drained soil which is high in organic matter with a pH of 6.0 to 7.5. Seed can be sown in spring or early autumn. Caraway should always be direct seeded as seedlings do not transplant well. Fall planted caraway will often produce seed the following summer. Sow seed about a half inch deep and thin seedlings to a final stand of six to eight inches apart. Space rows to accommodate cultivation equipment. Four to eight pounds of seed will plant an acre, depending on row spacing. The seed is slow to germinate, making weed control important during the seedling stage. Shallow cultivation is recommended. Since seed will not be produced until the second season, caraway is often intercropped with annuals such as beans or peas or grown with a cover crop.

Cultural Practices – Provide a regular supply of water through drip or overhead irrigation. Use shallow cultivation several times during the growing season to control

weeds. There are no pesticides registered for disease or insect control in North Carolina. Fortunately, caraway is usually unaffected by insects. To help prevent foliar diseases, keep the foliage as dry as possible by watering early in the day so the foliage dries quickly or by using drip irrigation. To reduce disease and insect problems, rotate caraway to different parts of the field each planting and destroy all plant debris after harvest.

Seed Harvest – To minimize the loss of seeds, harvest plants as soon as the seeds begin to turn dark and ripen. This will occur from June to August of the second year. Large producers may use combines to harvest the seeds. Small producers usually cut the plants with hand shears, scythe or knife, make small bunches of plants and hang them upside down until the seeds are dry. The seeds can then be removed by shaking over a basket or sheet. An acre may produce 500 to 2000 pounds of seed.

Seed Handling – Seed must be dried and stored in a dry place. Final drying can be done in the sun or in a drier with low heat. The seeds, which are frequently infested with insects, may be treated with scalding hot water or frozen to kill insect eggs.

Uses – The entire caraway plant is edible. The roots may be boiled and treated like cooked parsnips or carrots. The young leaves can be used in salads or for seasoning soups

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and stews. The licorice flavored seeds give rye bread its characteristic taste but are also good in potato soup, cheese spreads, sauerkraut and salad dressings. Several liqueurs are made with caraway, including Kummel and some Schnapps. The seeds and their oil are also used in a number of medicinal preparations for treating disorders such as rheumatism, eye infections and toothaches. The main constituents of caraway seed oil are carvone and limonene which have been reported to be potential cancer chemo preventative agents. The oil is also used as a fragrance component in cosmetic preparations including soaps, creams, lotions and perfumes.

References

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