

# Belle Vie

## Gardens & Nursery

May 2002 Newsletter

Spring is Finally Here to Stay

We were happy to have a chance to talk with many of you at the Saratoga Horticulture Research Foundation Spring plant sale last month. It seems that everyone was anxious to get going with their Spring planting. Tomatoes were a big hit, especially "Legend"--a super early variety that doesn't mind the cooler temperatures and doesn't require pollination to set fruit. May 11<sup>th</sup> begins a new season for the Morgan Hill Farmers' Market and we hope to see many of you there. You can pick up herbs for your garden--try planting basil along with your tomatoes, and bee balm, anise-hyssop or bergamot in your vegetable beds to entice those pollinators. As we did last year, we will also offer herbs that we cut fresh "buy-the-ounce"--grown locally in San Martin, you can't get fresher than that.

Beginning May 1, we expanded our opening days and hours as follows:

Thursday	9:00 AM to 4:00 PM
Friday	9:00 AM to 4:00 PM
Saturday	1:30 PM to 4:00 PM (after the Farmers' Market)

### **Herb of the Month: FENNEL (Foeniculum vulgare)**

Fennel has its roots in the Mediterranean. The Greeks and Romans used it in their cooking. Fennel tea was used to soothe the stomach after a rich meal. It was introduced to the "new world" by the Italian and Spanish explorers. Fennel seeds are included in some Italian sausage recipes and my Italian grandmother claimed fennel seeds were the secret ingredient in her delicious spaghetti sauce. The English brought fennel to the early settlements in Virginia and it can be seen in many of the gardens in Colonial Williamsburg today. A pocketful of fennel seeds was kept handy to nibble on during long church services as the seeds acted as an appetite suppressant.

A perennial, fennel should be planted in full sun. Fennel can cross-pollinate with dill, cilantro, and even tomatoes and beans, resulting in possible loss of flavor in those plants. Plant it down wind from your vegetable beds and you will avoid this problem. The delicate anise-licorice flavor of fennel is well worth the effort.

The leaves, tender stems and seeds can be used in cooking. Add at the last minute, since heat will diminish the flavor. Fennel blends very well with cream sauces, vegetable dips, and grilled fish. Here's a recipe to try:

#### **California Snapper with Fennel**

1 cup <b>fennel</b> leaves, tightly packed	1 clove peeled garlic
1/2 cup fresh lemon juice	1/4 tsp freshly ground black pepper
1/4 cup olive oil	1 4-6 lb. snapper, cleaned & scaled
lettuce leaves	

Place the **fennel** leaves, lemon juice, olive oil, garlic and ground pepper in a food processor with metal blade. Process until the fennel is minced. Cut 3 slashes in each side of snapper. Spread the fennel paste over the snapper and into the slits. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour. Light the barbecue. Place fish in fish-shaped wire-basket lined with lettuce leaves. Cook fish for about 8-10 minutes per side or until done. The thickest part of the fish should be firm yet slightly springy. Serve at once.

Happy Gardening,  
Donna Ahern and  
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