

Common Name: **Nigella**

Genus: *Nigella*

Species: *sativa*

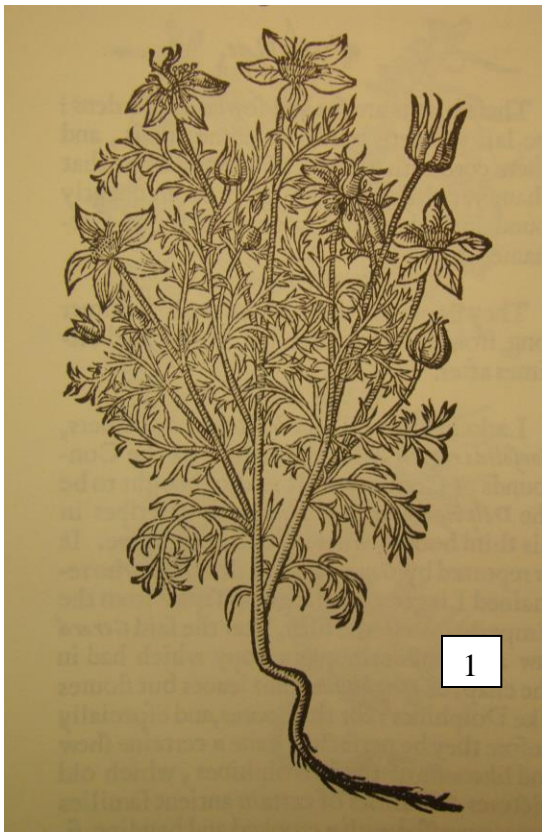
Family: Ranunculaceae

AKA: Black cumin, Fennel flower, Love-in-a Mist



Historical Uses:

Medical: “The feed of *Nigella Romana* drunke with wine, is a remedy against the shortness of breath, dissolveth and putteth forth windinesse, provoketh urine, the menses, increaseth milke in the brests of nurses if it be drunke moderately; otherwise it is not onely hurtfull to them, but to any that take thereof too often, or in too great a quantity. The feed killeth and druieth forth wormes, whether it be taken with wine or water, or laid to the navel in manner of a plaister. . . The feed parched or dried at the fire, brought into poudrer, and wrapped in a piece of fine lawne or sarcenet, cureth all murs, catarrhs, rheumes, and the pose, drieth the braine, and restoreth the sence of smelling unto those which have lost it, being often smelled unto from day to day, and made warme at the fire when it is used.” (1)



“*Nigella [ratde]* is warm and dry. It is not good in food for any person since it would make them sick. However, it does not harm or help cattle much. If anyone has ulcers on his or her head, but which are not scabies, let this person pound nigella and mix it with roasted lard. Let this person anoint the ulcers that are on the head with this mixture and rub it in often, and they will be healed. But also mix nigella with honey, and where there are many flies, streak it on the wall; the flies which will have tasted this will become sick and, fall down, and die.” (2)

“Diuretic, it is used as a plaster on the umbilicus to kill tapeworms, makes a good ointment for impetigo and scabies, and removes spots from the skin. It dispels gas, eases pains in the sides, and cures kidney and chest troubles when mixed with oil and wine and applied. It cures carbuncles, toothache, and earache, clears sinus passages and the



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fevers of colds, purges black bile, relieves serpent bites, and brings on menses. It should never be taken alone, even in small quantities, but always with much oil and wine.” (3)

Contemporary Uses:

Parts Used: Leaves, roots, pigment

Medicinal: “Internally for painful menstruation, postpartum contractions, insufficient lactation, poor appetite, fevers (especially intermittent),

and worms (especially in children). Externally for abscesses, hemorrhoids, skin diseases, and orchitis. Contraindicated during pregnancy.” (4)

Culinary: “Black cumin is a popular spice in India, Turkey, Greece, and the Middle East (especially in Egypt and Tunisia). The seeds have a spicy, fruity taste and were important as a seasoning before the introduction of pepper (*Piper nigrum*) to Europe from SE Asia in the 5th century AD.” (5)

Other: Planted as an ornamental garden flower for its butterfly blue flowers. (6)

Cautions: Contains strong paralyzing alkaloids and saponins. (7)



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Above: close-up of flower



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Area of Origin: Southwest Asia

Physical description: Erect, branched annual with pinnately divided leaves, ¾ inch to 1 ¼ inch long.

Plant type: Annual

Height: 12”

Flower color: White, blue-tinged

Flowering period: Summer

Soil type/requirements: Well-drained soil in sun.

Fruit: Inflated fruits with horn-like styles, containing aromatic black seeds.

Hardiness zone: USDA “Hardy”

Sun requirements: Full sun

Propagation: By seed sown *in situ* in autumn or spring.

To left: seed head

Sources

1. Gerard, p. 1083
2. Von Bingen, p. 14
3. Anderson, p.207
4. Bown, p. 288-289
5. Ibid
6. Anderson, p.207
7. Ibid

Illustrations/Images:

1. Gerard's Herbal 1633 ed.
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