

FENNEL



Fennel Seed Grissini

MAKES 20

This is a wonderful way of using any fennel seeds you have saved from plants in the garden. A few fennel seeds go a long way – too many give a not-altogether-pleasant tongue-numbing experience! Or substitute half a teaspoon of fennel pollen, shaken from fennel flower heads, for the seeds (see page 180).

1½ cups (200 g) unbleached
plain flour
50 g semolina
½ teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons instant dried yeast
1 teaspoon olive oil, plus extra
for greasing
¾ cup (160 ml) warm water

FENNEL FLAVOURING

⅓ cup (80 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 teaspoon fennel seeds, lightly
crushed with a mortar and pestle
sea salt

Combine flour, semolina, salt and yeast in the bowl of an electric mixer. Add oil to warm water and, with motor running, add mixture to bowl and work to form a smooth dough. Transfer the dough to a lightly oiled mixing bowl and cover with a damp tea towel. Leave for about 1 hour or until doubled in size. Knock dough back gently, then cover with a tea towel and allow to double again (about 30 minutes).

Preheat oven to 200°C. Using a pastry scraper, divide dough into 20 pieces, each about 3 cm in diameter. On a workbench, roll each piece into a thin sausage-shape about

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20 cm long, using both hands. Spread out your fingers as the piece of dough stretches (young cooks will enjoy doing this!).

To make fennel flavouring, pour olive oil into a baking tray with a rim. Swish garlic in oil, then scatter in fennel seeds and salt. Drag dough pieces through oil mixture and transfer to another baking tray, spacing them well apart. Use a pastry brush to brush remaining fennel flavouring onto the dough. Bake for 10 minutes and then turn. Bake for another 5 minutes or until crisp. Cool on a cake cooling rack. Store in an airtight container.

Fennel Seeds and Pollen

Entire heads of fennel, picked after the flowers have set seed, are an excellent flavouring to use when curing olives (see Cracked Green Olives on page 275). The seeds from dried heads of leafy fennel can be added in tiny quantities to bread doughs like the Fennel Seed Grissini on page 179. Fennel seed is also used in some Italian salamis and fresh sausages. One seed head of fennel will yield a good spoonful seeds.

If you rub the flowers of common fennel you can collect the golden pollen. This can be scattered over fish or included in bread dough. It is more subtle than the seeds, yet unmistakeably 'fennel' in character.

Fennel and Fish 'Pie'

Slice cooked potatoes, toss with chopped flat-leaf parsley, chopped chilli and olive oil, then season well with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Spread in a shallow baking dish. Scatter with chopped fennel leaves and a few fennel seeds. Top with thin slices of skinned fish (use flattish fillets such as John Dory, king dory or rockling).

Season with salt and pepper, then scatter with fennel leaves and smear with a thinnish layer of homemade tomato sauce (Fast Basic Tomato Sauce, see page 425). Top with fresh breadcrumbs mixed with grated lemon zest and chopped fennel fronds, then drizzle with olive oil and bake at 180°C for 20 minutes or until crumbs are golden.