

Star Anise Health and Beauty Benefits

QUICK FACTS

Name	Star Anise
Scientific Name	<i>Illicium verum</i>
Origin	Northeast Vietnam and southwest China
Common Names	Star anise, star aniseed, or Chinese star anise, badiam
Plant Growth	Medium evergreen tree
Growing Climate	Warm, subtropical
Soil	Humus- and compost-rich, with a texture that's both loamy and well-drained
Plant Size	8–15 (–20) m tall and a diameter of 25 cm.
Root	Thin and fusiform
Stem	Erect, round and grooved, and branched above
Bark	White to bright grey
Trunk	Straight, round
Branchlets	Green, glabrous branchlets
Leaf	10–15 cm long, 2.5 – 5 cm broad, alternate, simple, leathery, often clustered 3–4 together at the end of branches
Flower	Large, bisexual, 1–1.5 cm. in diameter, white–pink to red or greenish–yellow, axillary and solitary
Fruit Shape	Eight–pointed star
Fruit Color	Rich brown
Flavor/Aroma	Sharp, licorice, spicy, sweet
Health Benefits	Often beneficial in women's health, stimulates function of the pancreas, good for heart health, rheumatism and joint pain, improves digestion, beneficial in the treatment of sleep disorders, effective in the treatment of cough, and cold and flu symptoms as well as other upper respiratory ailments, combats bacterial and fungal infections, fights against free radicals.

Commonly known as star anise, star aniseed, or Chinese star anise is a spice that closely resembles anise in flavor, obtained from the star-shaped pericarp of the *Illicium verum* tree. Its scientific name originates from the Latin word *Illicio*. It is a medium-sized native evergreen tree of northeast Vietnam and southwest China. The star-shaped fruits are harvested right before ripening and are dried before use. Traditionally used as both a culinary spice and a medicinal herb, star anise appears to have medicinal properties that imbue it with significant health benefits. In traditional Chinese medicine, star anise is prescribed as a digestive aid, to promote the health of female reproductive organs and for

lactating mothers to increase breast milk production. It is important to note that you should only use the Chinese variety as the Japanese star anise variety can be toxic.

Star anise tastes much like standard anise seed, but is slightly bitterer, which is why it is preferred by some chefs to flavor culinary dishes. Star anise and anise seed are often mistaken for the same. Both spices contain a chemical compound in their essential oil called *anethole*, however, this is all that they share in common. For starters, anise seed belongs to the *Apiaceae* family and star anise comes from the *Schisandraceae* family. Anise seed is used more commonly in European dishes, particularly in Greek and French cuisine, since it possesses an intense, aromatic flavor that is ideal for sauces. While star anise is more common in Asian cooking. The spice is usually added whole to dishes to allow its flavor to infuse the food, or added in powder form and added more sparingly.

THE STAR ANISE PLANT

Star anise is an evergreen medium-sized tree, 8–15 (–20) m tall with a diameter of 25 cm and a straight rounded trunk and green, glabrous branchlets. The stem is erect, round and grooved, and branched above. The bark is white to bright grey. Leaves are 10–15 cm long, 2.5 – 5 cm broad, alternate, simple and leathery, and often clustered 3–4 together at the end of branches. Flowers are large, bisexual, 1–1.5 cm in diameter, white–pink to red or greenish–yellow, axillary and solitary. Fruits are star-shaped, reddish brown consisting of 6–8 carpels arranged in a whorl. Each carpel is 10 mm long, boat-shaped, hard and wrinkled, containing a seed. Seeds are brown, compressed, ovoid, smooth, shiny and brittle with a high oil content and licorice aroma. It has characteristic sweet, licorice, anise-like flavor. The plant prefers warm, subtropical climate and grows well in humus- and compost-rich soil, with a texture that's both loamy and well-drained.

HISTORY OF STAR ANISE

It is native of Egypt, Greece, Crete and Asia Minor and was cultivated by the ancient Egyptians, and brought to China; today star anise is grown almost exclusively in southern China and Indo-China. It was well known to the Greeks and even mentioned in writings by Dioscorides and Pliny. During the Roman Empire it was cultivated in Tuscany. In the middle Ages its cultivation spread to central Europe. It was first introduced to Europe in the 17 Century (1600S). The essential oil of star anise, obtained by the process of steam distillation, is substituted by European aniseed in commercial drinks.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF STAR ANISE

Star anise is a well-known digestive aid and often used to relieve cramps, indigestion, gas and bloating. Star anise seeds are an abundant source of B-complex vitamins such as thiamin, pyridoxine, niacin and riboflavin and known to increase neurochemicals in the brain. It is enriched with antioxidant vitamins such as vitamin A and vitamin C. Below are some of the health benefits of star anise.

WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Star anise has traditionally been used in China to help women during pregnancy and to help new mothers increase milk production. It is thought to boost pregnant women's immune systems and stave off illness. Researchers have also found that star anise's *anethole* compound has an estrogenic effect, which helps to modulate women's hormonal functions.

BENEFICIAL FOR HEART HEALTH

Star anise essential oil helps to maintain blood pressure levels. Additionally, the essential oil can be detoxifying, so it can improve blood flow, keeping the heart healthy.

BENEFICIAL FOR RHEUMATISM AND JOINT PAIN

When applied topically, star anise essential oil is an excellent treatment for rheumatism, joint and back pain. Before using the essential oil, it should be diluted in a carrier oil and massaged onto the affected areas.

FIGHTS FREE RADICALS

Antioxidants fight against free radicals that can cause cellular damage and may be responsible for diabetes, heart disease and even cancer. Free radicals are continually produced in our bodies as a metabolic byproduct. This excessive production and deposition can be neutralized by a diet rich in antioxidants. Multiple reports from countries around the world support star anise's powerful antioxidant property. This antioxidant property is due to the presence *linalool*, a chemical compound found in star anise as well as Vitamins A and C.

FIGHTS BACTERIA

Star anise has antibacterial properties. It has been shown to be effective against almost 70 drug-resistant bacterial strains. This herbaceous spice can be very effective at making seasonal allergies disappear over time.

COMBATS FUNGAL INFECTIONS

Star anise is effective at dealing with a common skin problem called *candidiasis*, caused by a fungus called *Candida albicans*. This fungus usually affects the outer surface of the skin, mouth, throat and genital areas. Researchers in Korea observed that star anise essential oil as well as some extracts of star anise possessed powerful antifungal properties.

BENEFICIAL FOR RESPIRATORY AILMENTS

Star anise can help ease the symptoms of asthma, lung inflammation and bronchitis.

EFFECTIVE IN TREATMENT OF FLU

Star anise is a good source of *Shikimic acid*, a natural organic compound important for biosynthesis and a powerful antiviral when combined with the compound *quercetin*, a plant pigment (flavonoid) that has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects. The combination of these two can help prevent influenza. In China and Taiwan, scientists are researching this combination as a bird flu treatment and vaccine.

Star anise tea can be a great natural cold and flu prevention. The herb has a warming effect that has traditionally been used to help bring relief to colds and respiratory congestion. This tea helps fight bacteria and viruses that are at the source of the common cold and flu.

EFFECTIVE IN TREATMENT OF COUGH

Star anise tea is an excellent natural remedy to ease a cough and soothe a sore throat. Simply prepare the tea and drink up to three times a day. Star anise essential oil has been found to be effective in soothing cough caused by asthma and bronchitis due to its expectorant quality.

IMPROVES DIGESTION

Star anise is often prepared as a tea, particularly in South East Asian countries and China. It is often used as an aid to digestive complaints such as gas, abdominal cramps, indigestion, bloating and constipation. To make use of this remedy, it is considered best to drink the tea after meals.

STIMULATES THE PANCREAS

The pancreas is a crucial organ for the control insulin levels. Star anise seeds help stimulate the pancreas. You can lower your risk for diabetes if your pancreas is in good health.

IMPROVES INSOMNIA

Star anise has mild sedative qualities which can help settle your nerves and ensure a good night's sleep. If you are having difficulty getting to sleep, try a cup of soothing star anise tea before bed.

THERAPEUTIC USES OF STAR ANISE

1. Star anise has been used in a tea brew as a traditional remedy for rheumatism symptoms.
2. Consuming star anise tea after meals helps ease digestive ailments such as bloating, gas and constipation.
3. The seeds are sometimes chewed after meals to aid digestion.
4. According to Traditional Chinese medicine, star anise is used to aid in relieving cold stagnation in the middle *jiao*.
5. It is thought to be a stimulant and expectorant.
6. It has been used topically and applied directly as a remedy for head lice and acne.
7. It is even suggested that drinking one glass of water infused with the crushed seeds of star anise at night can increase one's sex drive.

HOW TO EAT STAR ANISE

- It is used in baking and in distillation of spirits, most distinctively in the production of the liqueur *Galliano*.
- It is also used in the production of liqueurs such as Sambuca, Pastis, and a variety of brands of *absinthe*.
- Star anise can greatly enhance the flavor of meats.
- It is used as a spice in the traditional preparation of *Biryani* and *Masala Chai* all over India.
- It is widely used in Chinese, Malay and Indonesian cuisines, and in Indian cuisine, where it is the main component of *Garam Masala*.

OTHER FACTS OF STAR ANISE

- The star anise plant can be used for decorative purposes too, especially in tropical climates, because of its small, scented flowers and fragrant leaves.
- Do not mistake for Japanese star anise, which is poisonous and toxic, and should be avoided.
- The essential oil is frequently used as fragrance in perfumes, cosmetics, soaps and toothpaste, and to mask undesirable odors in OTC and prescription medication.

STAR ANISE SCIENTIFIC CLASSIFICATION

Rank	Scientific Name & Common Name
Kingdom	Plantae (Plants)
Subkingdom	Tracheobionta (Vascular plants)
Infra kingdom	Streptophyta (Land plants)
Superdivision	Spermatophyta (Seed plants)
Division	Magnoliophyta (Flowering plants)
Sub division	Spermatophytina

Class	Magnoliopsida (Dicotyledons)
Subclass	Magnoliidae
Order	Illiciales
Family	Illiciaceae (Star–anise family)
Genus	Illicium L. (Anisetree)
Species	Illicium verum Hook. f. (Staranise tree)
Synonyms	Illicium verum Hook. f.