

## Caraway

Caraway is a great addition to all kinds of foods. Its intense perfume and flavor can bring a surprising depth to anything from baked goods to meat dishes. This spice might resemble cumin, but be aware that the taste is very different.

Caraway is a flowering plant in the family Apiaceae. It is native to Asia, Europe, and North Africa. Its close relatives are carrots, cumin, and fennel. Caraway seed is actually not a spice; it is the plant's fruit. Though we often use the tiny fruit, the leaves and roots are also edible and used in many cuisines worldwide.

Caraway has a very spicy taste and aroma. The flavor of anise (licorice) is the dominant one, with hints of pepper and citrus contributing warmth and brightness. A bittersweet quality also mitigates the licorice note and keeps it from overpowering all other flavors.

The caraway seed's high concentration of natural essential oils gives the spice its unique flavor profile. These volatile oils, combined with the plant's dense supply of antioxidants, provide many of the medicinal and health benefits of caraway. Due to its essential oils, caraway has a sharp, stimulating aroma that is slightly minty or peppery.

### Cooking With Caraway

People use caraway seeds and other parts of the caraway plant in various ways. The leaves of the caraway plant can be used as an herb, either raw, dried, or cooked, similar to parsley. Chopped caraway leaves can be used in salads, soups, and stews. Like a vegetable, the root can be cooked and eaten, similar to parsnips or carrots.

Caraway seeds are a common savory spice in traditional European baking due to their distinct earthy fennel and anise taste and sharp aroma. They are featured prominently in rye bread, Irish soda bread, and traditional British caraway seed cake, among other baked goods. In Germany, caraway is a popular seasoning for cabbage dishes, sauerkraut, breads, onion tart, fried potatoes, and more. Hungarians and Serbians commonly sprinkle caraway over homemade salty scones.

Caraway is most commonly associated with rye breads in the US. The rest of the world uses caraway in many applications. Baked goods, desserts, and liquors are at the top of the list. Caraway seeds are widely used in harissa (chile paste), cheeses,

sauerkraut, potatoes, stews, casseroles, and as a flavoring for beef and pork. Long-simmering dishes can often benefit from a little caraway.

Caraway can be substituted with and used as a substitute for several spices that also come from the Apiaceae family. There is no exact substitute for caraway; other spices can give a fairly close taste. Not surprisingly, anise seeds, star anise, and fennel seeds will get you pointed in the right (licorice-like) direction. Coriander seeds and dill will give you the brightness of caraway without any of the licorice notes the others provide. It will not be exactly the same, but it will not be dissimilar and will provide a unique flavor.

The best way to store whole and ground caraway is in an airtight container and in a cool, dry place. Whole caraway can be kept in the refrigerator if you really want to prolong its shelf life.

Caraway is a great spice for adding Old World flavor to modern fare. It can be added to both sweet and savory dishes. Enhance your cooking with spices that elevate every meal to new heights of flavor.