

## Properties, cultivation method and requirements of cumin (*Cuminum cyminum* L.) - an overview

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**ABSTRACT:** Cumin (*Cuminum cyminum* L.) is a small annual and herbaceous plant belonging to the Apiaceae family with the flowers in white or pink color and spindle-shaped fruits in green and gray color which produces highly nutritional oleaginous seeds. *C. cyminum* is mainly cultivated in India, China, Saudi Arabia and neighboring countries of the Mediterranean. This crop has many uses in the pharmaceutical, food and cosmetics industry. Due to its flavor, cumin seed powder can be used as an additive in various foods, and it is the second most popular spice in the world. This plant is traditionally used in the treatment of dyspepsia, diarrhea, toothache, digestive disorders and to increase breast milk and as a disinfectant. Cumin seeds contain 2 to 5% essential oils, which is obtained from steam distillation of crushed cumin, and the composition of it depends on many factors including the time of harvest, method of extraction, type of cultivar, geographical origin and storage conditions.

**Keywords:** Cumin, *Cuminum cyminum* L., Cuminaldehyde, spice

### INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, medicinal herbs and aromatic herbs have been used by humans respectively to treat diseases and as spice in food preparation because they are less toxic and generally have no side effects. In addition, exploration of natural antimicrobial substances for preserving foodstuffs has attracted a lot of attention (Gould., 1995). One of the plants that has all three intended characters, is cumin (*Cuminum Cyminum* L). *C. Cyminum* is a small annual and herbaceous plant belonging to the Apiaceae family that is grown in the neighboring countries of the Mediterranean Sea (Hajlaoui et al., 2010). Traditionally, it is used in the treatment of many diseases and, its powder can be used as an additive in various foods (De et al., 2003; Hashemian et al., 2013; Nostro et al., 2005; Bettaieb Rebey et al., 2012a; Muthamma et al., 2008; Eikani et al., 1999; Joshi., 2000; Norman., 1990). The findings of various studies indicate that Cumin essential oils have considerable toxicity against insect pests of stored food, and moreover, due to the anti-bacterial and anti-*Aspergillus* property of this plant, it can prevent from food spoilage (Mohammadpour et al., 2012; Oroojalian et al., 2010; Hajlaoui et al., 2010; Iacobellis et al., 2005; Ziaee et al., 2014; Yeom et al., 2012; Tunc et al., 2000; Chaubey., 2008; Abdelgaleil et al., 2009). Thus, this review briefly introduces and represents this useful plant.

#### 1- History and distribution

Cumin originates from Egypt, Turkestan and East Mediterranean, but it is cultivated in Iran, China, India, Morocco, South Russia, Japan, Indonesia, Algeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, Malta, Spain and on a small scale in Central America (Tunçturk and Tunçturk., 2006; Ebrahimie et al., 2003; Thippeswamy and Naidu., 2005; Arctander., 1960). Medicinal plants has been traditionally used in Iran (Ghorbani, 2005), and cumin is an important medicinal product for Iran due to its commercial aspects, and it is commonly cultivated in arid and

semiarid regions of Iran (Kafi et al., 2006; Kamkar et al., 2011; Rezvani Moghaddam et al., 2007). Cumin occupies about 26% of the land area devoted to medicinal plants in Iran (Koocheki et al., 2004).

## 2- Morphological description

Cumin (*Cuminum cyminum* L.) is a diploid species with 14 chromosomes (i.e.  $2n = 14$ ). It is a small annual and herbaceous plant belonging to the Apiaceae family which grows to a height of about 60 cm. Its flowers are small, with white or pink color in compound umbel form that appear at the end of the stem in the months of May – June. The leaves are 5–10 cm long, pinnate or bipinnate, thread-like leaflets. The fruit is a lateral fusiform or ovoid achene with a length of 4–5 mm, containing a single seed, which can be seen in green and gray, even white and yellow in some varieties (Hashim and E1-Kiey., 1962). *Cuminum cyminum* L produces highly nutritional oleaginous seeds, which consist of a stripped paired or separate carpel (Pottier-Alapetite., 1979). The root is long and vertical and the stem is grooved with double or triple splits.

## 3- Chemical compounds

The analysis of cumin fruits determined that they contain fixed oil (approximately 10%) and volatile oil (1–5%) that it is because of the special aroma of cumin, in addition, protein, cellulose, sugar and minerals are also available in Cumin (Li and Jiang., 2004; Spices Board Statistics., 2006). Volatile oil mainly contains monoterpene hydrocarbons ( $\alpha$ -pinene,  $\beta$ -pinene,  $p$ -cymene and  $\gamma$ -terpinene) and oxygenated monoterpene (1, 8-cineole, cuminaldehyde, cuminyl alcohol and safranal) (Bettaieb Rebey et al., 2012a; Burt., 2004; Gachkar et al., 2007; Naveed et al., 2013; Oroojalian et al., 2010; Jirovetz et al., 2005; El-Hamidi and Ahmed., 1966; Nestorova et al., 1977; Lis-Balchin et al., 1998; Hiller., 1999). Cuminaldehyde or 4-isopropylbenzaldehyde ( $C_{10}H_{12}O$ ) which is the main components of cumin essential oil can induce different biological activities (Jayathilakan et al., 2007; Rasooli et al., 2007; Oroojalian et al., 2010, Al-Gaby., 1998; Farag., 1997). Due to low levels of anti-nutritional factors, such as tannin, oxalic acid and phytate in cumin, thus making it a good candidate as a bionutrient.

## 4- Factors Affecting the Composition of Cumin

Cumin oil possesses various compounds at different concentrations in different regions. This difference in chemical composition of the oils depends on various factors, including plant part, harvest time, type of cultivar, storage conditions, climatic effects on the plants, seasonal changes even sunlight duration, geographic origin and processing of plant materials such as extraction methods and the conditions of analysis (Behera et al., 2004; Bettaieb Rebey et al., 2012b; Wang et al., 2006 and 2009; Zhang et al., 2011; Oroojalian et al., 2010; Telci et al., 2006; Moghaddam et al., 2007 and 2015; Koenen., 2001; Lawrence., 2002; Hussain et al., 2008).

## 5- Uses

### 5-1- Food

Due to its distinctive aroma, *C. cyminum* seeds are used as a spice in the food industries of India, Pakistan, North Africa, Middle East, Sri Lanka, Cuba, Northern Mexico, and the Western countries (Hajlaoui et al., 2010; Daniel and Maria., 2000). Cumin powder is an important element in curry mixes and many other tasty spice mixtures and some bakery products. Furthermore, it can be used to prepare fish dishes in mixture with salt and olive oil. In Turkey it is widely cultivated in Central Anatolian region and as a spice used in the preparation of sucuk (a type of Turkish sausage) (Baser et al., 1992).

### 5-2- Pharmaceutical

In traditional medicine, the *C. cyminum* seeds have been used for treatment of digestive disorders, dyspepsia, flatulence, diarrhea, toothache, epilepsy, jaundice and colic as well as stimulating breast milk production in Iranian traditional medicine (Iacobellis et al., 2005; De et al., 2003; Hashemian et al., 2013; Nostro et al., 2005; Bettaieb Rebey et al., 2012a; Muthamma et al., 2008; Eikani et al., 1999; Joshi., 2000; Norman., 1990). It also has diuretic, cytotoxic, anti-tumor, anti-inflammatory, emmenagogic, anti-fungal and antispasmodic properties (Hajlaoui et al., 2010; Einafshar et al., 2012; Janahmadi et al., 2006; Singh et al., 2002; Allahghadri et al., 2010; Oroojalian et al., 2010). The extract of *C. cyminum* can reduce the blood glucose and plasma and tissue lipids, and it can also improve eyesight (Konczak and Zhang., 2004; Dhandapani et al., 2002; Roman-Ramos., 1995). Anthocyanin found in cumin oil not only prevents tumors and cancer cells growth in humans, but also reduces the neurodegenerative processes in Parkinson and Alzheimer disease (Joseph et al., 2005). Even at a very low concentration, *C. cyminum* oil is as good as standard antibiotics or even acts more effective than them (Gachkar et al., 2007; Singh et al., 2002).

### **5-3- Improving the Food**

Due to the presence of phenolic compounds and essential oils and anthocyanin in cumin (*Cuminum cyminum* L.), antimicrobial and antioxidant effects were obtained with this plant (Gachkar et al., 2007; Leopold et al., 2005; Özcan and Erkmén., 2001; Viuda-Martos et al., 2008; Hajlaoui et al., 2010; Khosravi et al., 2011a,b; Mohammadpour et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2002, Panico et al., 2005; Quina et al., 2009). Furthermore, it has anti-*Aspergillus* activity (Mohammadpour et al., 2012) and antibacterial activity against Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacterial species as well as yeast strains (Oroojalian et al., 2010; Hajlaoui et al., 2010; Iacobellis et al., 2005).

### **5-4- Elimination of the pests**

The findings of various studies showed that the essential oil of *C. cyminum* has significant toxicity against food insect pests (Ziaee et al., 2014; Yeom et al., 2012; Tunc et al., 2000; Chaubey., 2008; Abdelgaleil et al., 2009). The insect pests of the stored products can be eliminated through fumigant, contact, and ingestion action of the poisons that contain cumin monoterpenes (Prates et al., 1998; Lee et al., 2003; Rozman et al., 2007; Abdelgaleil et al., 2009).

## **6- Cultivation**

*C. cyminum* mostly grows in Mediterranean climates, and its cultivation requires a long, hot summer of 3–4 months, with daytime temperatures around 30°C. It is grown from seed. Planting date depends on climatic conditions of region, so that in temperate regions, it is an autumn crops and in cold areas, it is grown for a spring production, and needs fertile, well-drained soil (Hajlaoui et al., 2010). November is a good time for autumn sowing, while spring planting is done in March. Compared with the spring, planting cumin in the autumn yields more seed production and better oil function. The superiority of autumn planting of cumin to enhance the cumin seed production was attributed to a better control of the diseases (Rezvani Moghaddam et al., 2014).

12-15 kg of high quality seed is required per hectare. Seed depth depending on soil texture is between 1/5 - 2 cm, and seeds are directly planted in the ground. Seeds should be soaked in water for 24-36 hours to enhance the growing power. The ground should be irrigated immediately after planting but not so hard that may wash the seeds. The next irrigation is done 8-10 day after the first irrigation which leads to seed germination. After that, depending on weather conditions, irrigation should be done every 12-20 days.

Agriculture factors such as planting date, density, irrigation, nitrogen fertilizer, weed control, harvest time and different climates can influence the quantitative and qualitative components of cumin (Chandhary and Gupta., 1982; Jangir and Singh., 1996; Ehteramian., 2003). Also, rate of seed for planting depends on soil type, moisture and fertility of soil, culturing area, type and method of culturing, planting date, germination rate, 1000 seeds weight, seed purity and agronomical managements (Sefa., 1986; Patel et al., 1991; Sadeghi., 1991).

## **7- Harvest Time**

100 to 120 days after planting cumin, the crop is ready to harvest, and harvesting is done manually. The rate of seed is different depending on the climatic conditions; seed production ranges eight to one ton per hectare.

## **8- Cumin Requirements**

During the growing time, cumin needs enough heat and light. The amount of essential oil in hot regions with abundant light is more than other areas. During flowering and fruit production, less moisture is required. Cumin has good resistance to water shortage; therefore, it can be planted in dry lands. Its cultivation in light sandy soils which are free of nutrients and materials is not suitable because such kinds of soil are susceptible to prepare condition suitable to get fungal disease. Cumin Seedling is weak thus it does not like heavy soil. Therefore, the best soil is sandy soil with medium texture. The suitable PH for the cultivation of cumin is 4.5 - 8.2. Increasing of phosphor dissolved in the soil improves plant nutrient status and leads to a higher seed yield (Rodriguez and Fraga., 1999).

## **9- Resistance to Drought**

Cumin is a drought tolerant species with high antioxidant levels. At drought stress, endogenous cytokinin acts as an antioxidant and reduces the damaging effects of drought (Alinian et al., 2016; Zhang and Ervin., 2004; Musgrave., 1994). Studies show that droughts have positive effects on the biosynthesis of secondary metabolites in aromatic plants such as cumin, and moderate drought conditions increases nutritional value and growth of aerial parts of cumin (Petropoulos et al., 2008; Alinian et al., 2016; Bettaieb Rebey et al., 2012b; Jaafar et al., 2012;

Bettaieb Rebey et al., 2011). However, the drought has adverse effects on fatty acid content of cumin seeds, and although the phenolic compounds increase during moderate drought, but in severe drought, the reducing of phenolic compounds occurs (Bettaieb Rebey et al., 2011).

## 10- pests and diseases

Fusarium wilt and blight diseases caused by the pathogen *Fusarium oxysporum* and *Alternaria burnsii* respectively, are threatening diseases of cumin (Azza et al., 2004; Kafi et al., 2006; Lodha.,1995). Fungal blight disease of cumin damages the plant at the time of flowering. The symptoms of the disease include brown spots on the stems. To treat this disease, fungicides containing copper compounds such as dithane, Blitox 50 and cupro can be used. Diseases usually increase in warm and humid conditions, and they are considered as the limiting factors of production (Lodha., 1995; Kafi et al., 2006). Infected field may not be replanted with cumin for at least 10 years (Azza et al., 2004). Seed pre-sowing treatment with a fungicide such as benlate (Azza et al., 2004; Champawat and Pathak., 1991) or fumigation the soil with methyle bromide (Larkin and Fravel., 1998), can provide a control measure against the disease, (however, the use of methyl bromide in large scale in the open field is limited).

## 11- Conclusion

Cumin (*Cuminum cyminum* L.) is a small annual plant belonging to the Apiaceae family. In addition to its fragrance and good taste which makes it the second most popular spice of the world, *C. cyminum* has therapeutic properties for digestive diseases, toothache, dyspepsia, flatulence and so on that has traditionally promoted its use since old times (Iacobellis et al., 2005; De et al., 2003; Hashemian et al., 2013; Nostro et al., 2005; Bettaieb Rebey et al., 2012a; Muthamma et al., 2008; Eikani et al., 1999; Joshi., 2000; Norman., 1990). Moreover, due to its preventing effect on fungal development and its power to eliminate the free radicals and due its safety effects, its effectiveness in low concentration and high performance of the oil, cumin has been recognized as a reproducible source of compounds which protect food against the quantitative and qualitative damages and consequently improve their useful life (Hajlaoui et al., 2010; Kedia et al., 2014; Mohammadpour et al., 2012).

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