**Agastache foeniculum**

(ah-gas-TAH-chee fen-IK-yoo-lum)

(previously *A. anethiodora, Lophanthus anisatus*)

**Family:** Lamiaceae

**Names:** blue giant hyssop, elk mint, fennel giant hyssop, fragrant giant hyssop, giant fennel hyssop, giant hyssop; lavender giant hyssop; licorice mint; Hysope anisee (French); Anijsnetel (Dutch)

**Description:** An obvious member of the mint family with upright, square stems. The height is up to 3 feet with a width of 2 feet. Flowers are vivid blue-purple and rise in 2- to 6-inch spires. The leaves are opposite each other, oval at the base, coming to a point at the tip. Roughly textured, toothed edges, with the largest ones at the base, about 2 inches wide and 3 inches long. Strongly licorice scented and blooms from July to September. Found from Washington to Illinois in the US and from British Columbia to southern Ontario in Canada, although very rarely in or west of the Rocky Mountains.

**Cultivation:** A perennial to zone 4, anise hyssop germinates in 1-2 weeks. Space 1 to 1 ½ feet. Soil temperature best at 70-85°F and should be well-drained, semi-rich, sandy loam. It prefers full sun but adapts to partial shade. Can be propagated by seed, cuttings and root division. Also self-seeds. Because the seeds are quite small, they can successfully germinate only under a light soil covering and should be planted either very near to, or actually on the soil surface. The seeds germinate well, emerging in 4-10 days. Seedlings transplant easily. The plant grows very slowly initially and often requires 2 years from seed to bloom. Seeds can be planted in late fall, allowed to lie dormant through the winter, to germinate in the early spring. Cuttings can be rooted from soft or semi-ripe stems. It does best in cool weather. Abundant moisture is required, especially during dry periods. Under drought conditions, plants will stop flowering in late summer. On the other hand, excessive rainfall or irrigation can also be damaging. Anise hyssop dies back to the ground after a killing frost and is late to come up in the spring. Harvest leaves at any time during the growing season. They can be used fresh or may be air-

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dried and stored in air-tight containers. The most pungent tea is brewed from fresh leaves or flowers. It’s recommended harvesting the leaves early in the day during a sunny, rain-free period, in the belief that this promoted the highest concentration of oils. Grown as an essential oil plant, it has been estimated that the 50 kg of aromatic oils per ha can be expected.

History: Neither an anise nor a hyssop, this herb belongs to a genus of plants commonly called giant hyssop and tastes like anise. The genus name Agastache comes from the Greek agan and stachys, translating as “many ears of wheat,” an allusion to the many tiny blossoms of the inflorescence. Used by Native Americans to make beverages and as a condiment in foods, as well as medicinally. It is cultivated in the US as a honey plant, yielding an excellent light-colored honey.

Constituents: The major constituent of the oil is usually methyl chavicol which imparts an anise-like flavor and is used in the manufacture of perfumes, liqueurs, some foods and root beer. Other chemicals in the essential oil include spathulenol, bornyl acetate.

Medicinal Uses: The root of anise hyssop was an ingredient in North American Chippewa Indian lung formulas, and the Cree sometimes carried the flowers in their medicine bundles. The Cheyenne employed an infusion of the leaves for colds, chest pains from coughing and a weak heart. The roots were also used for coughs. The leaves in a steambath were used to induce sweating; and powdered leaves on the body for high fevers. Anise hyssop has been used by North American First Nations people as a breath-freshener and as a sweetener. Agastache is used in Chinese prescriptions for heatstroke, headache, fever, and angina. Leaves are used as poultices for sores. It is used in dried flower arrangement, and the essential oils are used in perfumes and aromatherapy. It is also a good source of nectar.

Other Uses: Excellent bee plant that produces nectar all day and is commercially grown for its delicious honey. Hummingbirds also love it.

Culinary Uses: A delightful licorice-mint taste makes anise hyssop leaf tea pleasing either hot or cold. The Plains Indians of North America found it a tasty food sweetener. To replace anise in a recipe, make a strong anise hyssop tea (using 1 teaspoon in ½ cup water) and replace half of the recipe’s liquid with it. The fresh or dried leaves complement peas, lamb and other dishes, and can be added to flavor fruit salads and beverages. The flowers are also culinarily useful. The flowers have an anise flavor and can be used as a seasoning in baking and in teas, as well as in salads and as garnishes. The flowers tend to have a lighter flavor than the leaves.

Recipes:

**Anise Hyssop Mushroom Pizza**

**Pizza dough:**
- 5 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 packet quick-rising yeast
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 cup lukewarm water
- 1 Tbsp olive oil

Add four cups of flour, yeast and salt to a bowl. Mix together. Slowly stir in water. Continue to stir. As mixture becomes doughy, add olive oil. Add additional flour if needed. Knead until firm adding flour if necessary to keep the dough from being sticky. Form dough into a ball, cover with a towel and allow to rise in a warm place until doubled in bulk. Punch the dough down and knead briefly. Roll dough out into a circle and place on a lightly oiled pizza pan. Bake in a preheated 450F oven for 4-6 minutes to cook through, but do not let it brown. Remove from oven.

**TOPPING**
- 12 oz mushrooms, sliced
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- ½ cup anise hyssop florets, divided
- ½ cup Monterey Jack cheese, shredded

Sauté mushrooms in olive oil over a medium heat just until mushrooms are cooked through, but not browned. Toss in ¼ cup anise
hyssop florets. Spoon mushrooms onto cooked pizza dough. Sprinkle with cheese. Bake at 450°F for 4-7 minutes, or until cheese begins to lightly brown. Remove from oven, sprinkle with remaining anise hyssop florets and serve. *(Edible Flowers from Garden to Palate)*

### Anise Hyssop Lemon Cake

1 (18 oz) package lemon cake mix
1 cup chopped fresh, dried, or frozen anise hyssop flowers
1 cup chopped pecans, toasted

Prepare cake mix as directed on package. Fold anise hyssop and pecans into batter. Pour batter into a greased and floured Bundt pan. Bake at 350°F for 35-40 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool in pan for 10 minutes on a rack.

**LEMON SAUCE**

1 cup water
1 cup sugar
2 Tbsp all-purpose flour
¼ tsp salt
3 Tbsp lemon juice
2 tsp lemon zest
1 Tbsp butter
1 Tbsp chopped lemon verbena

Boil water in a saucepan. Add sugar, flour, and salt. Bring to a boil and cook 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Add juice and remaining 3 ingredients. Serve warm over anise Hyssop Lemon Cake or pound cake. *(Today’s Herbal Kitchen)*

### Raspberry-Lime Crush with Anise Hyssop Flowers

¼ cup fresh anise hyssop flowers
¾ cup honey
3 cups boiling water
2 cups fresh lime juice
fresh anise hyssop flower sprigs

Put the hyssop flowers and honey in a heatproof pitcher or bowl and pour the boiling water over them. Let cool for 30 minutes. Strain, then add the lime juice and raspberries. Cover and let steep for 2 hours in the refrigerator. Puree in 2 batches in a blender and serve over ice, garnished with additional hyssop flowers. *(Recipes from an American Herb Garden)*

### Hot Chinese Beef with Anise Hyssop and Orange

½ cup minced fresh anise hyssop flowers and leaves
1/3 cup fresh orange juice
2 Tbsp sherry vinegar
2 Tbsp shoyu
1 Tbsp honey
2 tsp grated orange zest
½ tsp hot red pepper flakes
1 lb flank, skirt, or top round steak, sliced diagonally into ¼ inch thick slices
2 tsp cornstarch
2 tsp vegetable oil, preferably canola
1 tsp hot pepper sesame oil

Make a marinade by combining the anise hyssop, orange juice, vinegar, shoyu, honey, zest, and pepper flakes in a nonreactive
dish. Add the beef to the marinade, stir to coat, cover, and let stand for 30 minutes at room temperature. Remove the meat from the marinade and stir the cornstarch into the reserved marinade. Heat a wok or large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat and add the vegetable oil by pouring it in a circle near the rim. When the oil is hot, add the meat and fry, stirring constantly until cooked through, about 3-5 minutes. Add the reserved marinade and cook until the sauce is thickened, continuing to stir, about 2 minutes. Drizzle with the sesame oil, stir, and serve immediately. (Recipes from an American Herb Garden)

**Lemony Anise Hyssop Tea Bread**

1 bread or loaf pan
2 cups flour
1 Tbsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
½ cup butter at room temperature
½ cup sugar
grated rind of one lemon
1/3-1/2 cup anise hyssop flowers, finely chopped
2 eggs, beaten
½ cup lemon juice
½ cup chopped walnuts

Grease and flour the bread or loaf pan. Preheat oven to 350F. Sift together flour, baking powder and salt. In another bowl, cream butter with sugar until fluffy. Then add lemon rind, chopped flowers and eggs and beat mixture just until thoroughly combined. Stir in lemon juice. Gradually mix in dry ingredients and nuts, mixing until blended. Spoon into prepared pan and bake 50-55 minutes. Cool on rack. (Cooking from the Garden)

**Anise Hyssop and Almond Butter Cookies**

1 cup sugar
¼ cup anise hyssop florets
1 extra-large egg
12 Tbsp unsalted butter, cut into 12 pieces
½ tsp vanilla extract
2 cups flour
½ tsp salt
3 oz almonds, chopped

Preheat oven to 350F. Combine sugar and flowers in processor. Add egg and process for 60 seconds. Add butter and vanilla and process for 60 seconds. Mix flour, salt and add to processor. Add almonds just until mixed. Turn dough out onto lightly floured surface and gather into a ball. Divide into 3 parts and roll in a cylinder shape (2” in diameter). Wrap in plastic and chill for 1 hour. Slice to desired thickness and bake 12 minutes until golden brown. Makes 5-6 dozen. (Never Enough Thyme with the Herbs)

**Chilled Melon Soup with Anise Hyssop**

2 very ripe cantaloupes
2 cups champagne
2 Tbsp sugar
salt
2 Tbsp anise hyssop leaves (about 12 leaves)

Place a serving bowl in the refrigerator to chill. Peel and seed 1 cantaloupe, and cut it into chunks. Place the chunks in a blender with the champagne and sugar. Blend for 1 minute and strain. Cut the other melon in half, and remove the seeds. With a spoon, shave out the ripe meat in thin ribbons, and place them in the chilled bowl. Ladle the soup over the shaved melon. Add salt to taste. Cut the anise hyssop leaves crosswise into thin slices, sprinkle them over the soup, and serve. (My Favorite Herb)

**Anisette Herb Liqueur**

1 fifth vodka
2 cups anise hyssop with flowers
1 cup tarragon
5 sprigs lemon verbena (short)
1 Tbsp fennel seed (crushed)
1 star anise
1 stick cinnamon

Combine alcohol, herbs, seeds, and spices in large glass jar with tight lid. Steep 4-6 weeks; stir or shake once in awhile. Store in dark, cool place while steeping. In saucepan, combine honey or sugar and water, cook over medium heat stirring until completely dissolved and mixture is warm. Cool to lukewarm, strain herb/alcohol and combine with syrup. Rebottle and let mature for several weeks. Decant/strain again, if necessary, and rebottle into decorative
Anise Hyssop Custard with Black Pansy Syrup

Custard:
1 cup milk
1 cup whipping cream
¼ cup sugar
6 Tbsp chopped anise hyssop flowers
2 eggs plus 3 egg yolks

Black Pansy Syrup:
1 cup loosely packed black pansy petals
2 cups sugar
1 cup water

Gooseberry puree:
3 cups red English gooseberries
Maple syrup, to taste

To prepare custard, combine milk and cream in a mixing bowl. Pour half of mixture into a small saucepan and add sugar and anise hyssop flowers. Place over low heat and heat just until small bubbles appear at pan edge, stirring to dissolve sugar. Remove from heat and stir into remaining milk mixture until well mixed. Set aside to cool. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

Preheat oven to 350F. Have ready six ½ cup custard molds. Select a shallow 9- by 13-inch baking dish and add enough hot water to reach halfway up sides of molds once they are placed in dish. Place dish in oven. In mixing bowl beat together eggs and egg yolks until well blended. Slowly beat in infused milk mixture, then strain through fine-mesh sieve into clean bowl or pitcher. Divide custard evenly among molds.

Place molds in baking dish in oven and bake until tip of small knife inserted in center comes out clean (25-30 minutes). Remove molds to wire rack and let cool completely. Cover and refrigerate at least 1 hour before serving.

To prepare syrup place petals in a food processor fitted with metal blade. Add 1/3 cup of the sugar and pulse 4 times to grind pansies into sugar, then process continuously for 30 seconds. Transfer to a small saucepan and add remaining 1 2/3 cups sugar and the water. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stir once, reduce heat to low, and simmer until mixture reaches syrup stage (120F on candy thermometer). Remove from heat, pour into heatproof container, and let cool completely.

To prepare gooseberry puree, place gooseberries in food processor fitted with metal blade and puree. Force through medium-mesh strainer into a bowl. Sweeten with maple syrup. To assemble custards run a small knife around edges of molds and invert onto serving plates. Pour some of the black pansy syrup over each custard. Arrange 1 to 1 ½ tablespoons gooseberry puree around each custard in circular fashion to contain syrup. Decorate each plate with anise hyssop flowers and leaves and a black pansy flower. (Cooking from the Gourmet’s Garden)

Resources:
Companion Plants, www.companionplants.com
plants, seeds
Crimson Sage,; http://www.crimson-sage.com
Plants
Richters,; www.richters.com seeds, plants, dried root

References:
Cooking from the Garden, Rosalind Creasy, Sierra Club Books, 1988, ISBN: 0-87156-731-8
The Madison Herb Society Cookbook, Madison Herb Society Cookbook, 1995;
Never Enough Thyme with the Herbs, Linda Kosa-Postl, 1995, Garden of Weeden Publishing,
Today’s Herbal Kitchen, Memphis Herb Society, 1995