

BASIL

Basil is probably the most sought after herb in the United States today. It's one of my favorite herbs and it's no wonder after tasting the pungent herb on anything from tomatoes to mozzarella cheese.

Botanical Name: Ocimum.basilicum
Sweet or Common Basil

Varieties: Thai, spicy globe, opal, purple ruffle, holy, lemon, bush, cinnamon, plus many more

Plant Type: very tender annual

Height: 12-24"

Spacing: plant 12-18" apart

Propagation: very easy to start from seed. Seeds will sprout within 3-4 days of planting. Basil should be the last herb planted or transplanted outdoors in the spring because it is extremely tender and will not withstand a frost. Basil needs very little fertilizer, just a small amount as it is getting established.

Planting Location: full sun, sheltered area. Needs good air circulation, excellent for growing in containers.

Soil: dry, light, well-drained

Maintenance: pinch out flower heads to ensure fullness and longer life.

Harvesting: Always cut basil with a sharp scissors or pinch it off with your fingers. Cut the stem just above a leaf cluster, this will force the plant to branch out and increase its yield.

Preserving: Basil is typically not recommended for drying, however, I have had good luck. I freeze entire leaves and this works fine.

History/Mythology: The Hindus regard all basil plants as sacred. In Haiti basil is believed to belong to the pagan love goddess Erzulie, as powerful protector. In Italy a pot of basil placed on a balcony means a women is ready for a suitor to arrive, and if he brings her a sprig of basil, she would surely fall in love with him.

Culinary: Basil is excellent with fresh tomatoes, garlic, pasta dishes, and is famous for pesto. Thai basil is a must for Thai dishes. Cook basil only briefly at the end of cooking.