

Grow your own Basil

BAAH-SIL OR BAY-ZIL

How do you pronounce basil?

The soft "ah" is English and the hard "A" is American. The word basil comes from the Greek basileus (with a soft "ah" sound) meaning "king," it is believed to have grown above the spot where St. Constantine and Helen discovered the Holy Cross.

Plant Type: Annual

Scientific Name: *Ocimum basilicum*

Mature Plant Size: 45cm high x 30cm wide

Light: Full Sun

Flowering Period: July to August

Soil Type: rich, moist, well-drained soil

pH Range: 6.0

Known Pests: Aphids, cutworms

Growing basil is relatively easy as long as the growing environments has suitable light and temperature levels. Basil is grown for its fragrant, tasty leaves that can be added raw to salads, sandwiches or used in cooked dishes such as the ever-popular pasta with tomato and basil sauce.

PLANTING

If growing basil in a container make sure you have good drainage, never let your basil sit in water (that includes water collecting in the saucer, fill it with gravel if necessary). If you are growing your basil in the garden then make sure you have a rich, weed free spot. Consider adding an organic mulch around the plants to help retain soil moisture and prevent weeds. Basil likes fertile, well-drained, light textured soil. So, incorporate compost or well-rotted manure into your soil in the spring for perfect garden conditions. If growing your basil in a container then use a quality, general purpose planter mix.

Basil plants can be planted out when the weather is warm enough (usually sometime in late May or early June, or when night temperatures are consistently above 10°C) or can be directly sown from seed in late May. Before sowing make sure that the compost or soil is moist.

Basil should be grown in a bright, sunny spot that gets a minimum of 6-8 hours a day. Basil can also be grown indoors on a sunny windowsill, just try to find a warm, sunny spot that is sheltered from drafts.

PLANT CARE

If growing Basil in containers or indoor pots then add a small amount of fertilizer every month or so. Water every week (more often if growing in outdoor containers). When watering your basil make sure to water at the base of the plant avoiding showering the leaves and stems. Be sure to pinch out any flowers that appear, as this will help preserve the plants flavour and also channel the plants energies into more leaf growth.

HARVESTING

Basil is a pick and come again crop. It is best to pick a few leaves off a number of plants than picking all the leaves off one plant. Harvest the top most leaves first. Basil will grow all year round indoors but outdoor plants should be dug up and brought indoors before the first fall frosts if you want to extend the plants growing season into the winter.

Once harvested basil can either be frozen or dried for later use. To dry Basil cut the stems at soil level and dry them in a dehydrator or hang bunches up to air dry in a warm room, this should take about a week. Once the leaves are dried you can remove them from the stems and store them in a dry airtight container for up to 12 months.

Popular Basil Cultivars

| COMMON NAME | SPECIES AND CULTIVARS | DESCRIPTION |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Sweet basil | <i>Ocimum basilicum</i> | The best known, with a strong clove scent when fresh |
| Thai basil | <i>O. basilicum</i> var. <i>thyrsiflorum</i> 'Siam Queen' | It has an exotic scent of liquorice |
| Genovese basil | <i>O. basilicum</i> 'Genovese Gigante' | Almost as popular as sweet basil, with similar taste |
| Cinnamon basil | <i>O. basilicum</i> 'Cinnamon' | Also called Mexican spice basil, with a strong smell of cinnamon |
| Spicy globe basil | <i>O. basilicum</i> 'Spicy Globe' | Grows in a compact bush form with very small leaves |
| Purple ruffles basil | <i>O. basilicum</i> 'Purple Ruffles' | Solid purple colour with a rich and spicy anise-like flavour |
| Fino verde basil | <i>O. basilicum</i> 'Piccolo' | Small, narrow leaves with a sweeter, less pungent smell |
| Nufar basil | <i>O. basilicum</i> 'Nufar F1' | A cultivar of Genovese that is resistant to wilt |
| Lettuce leaf basil | <i>O. basilicum</i> 'Lettuce Leaf' | Has leaves so large they are sometimes used in salad |
| Red rubin basil | <i>O. basilicum</i> 'Red Rubin' | Leaves are a strong magenta colour with a similar flavour to sweet basil |