

# GROWING BASIL

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.



## Preparation

If growing Basil in pots then ensure that adequate drainage is allowed from the base of the pot (line with coarse gravel if necessary).

If growing outside then ensure the soil is well dug over and weed free before sowing.

Before sowing ensure that the compost or soil is moist (water generously the day before sowing).

## Sowing

It is vital that Basil is not exposed to the last spring frosts so if sowing outside be patient and sow in late September / October. Sow at any time if the plant is always to be kept indoors. If sowing inside and planting outside late then you can sow in late August / September.

Sow the seed thinly and if growing in pots sow enough for a few plants in each pot. Cover the seeds with 1/2 cm of compost and firm gently.

Basil seeds should germinate in about a week and once the seedlings have developed 2 pairs of true leaves then you can thin out the weakest seedlings in each pot, leaving the strongest plants.

## Position

Basil should be grown in a position that receives a good amount of sunlight - around 6-8 hours a day. Basil can be grown indoors on a sunny windowsill or outdoors in containers or soil. If growing outside try and position the Basil in a sheltered spot that avoids cold winds.

## Soil type

Basil likes a fertile soil that has been well dug to allow good soil air circulation. Introducing well-rotted organic compost or manure into the soil a month or so before sowing will help this.

If growing in pots then a general purpose compost is a suitable soil solution.

## Tending

If growing indoors in pots using compost then weeds shouldn't be a problem. If growing outdoors then you can add an organic mulch around the Basil plants to help aid soil moisture retention and prevent weed establishment.

If growing Basil in containers or indoor pots then add a small amount of fertiliser every month.

Water every week (more often if growing in outdoor containers or indoors). 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. This will help preserve the plants flavour and also channel the plants energies into more leaf growth.



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## 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 be frozen for later use.

Basil can be used in fresh or dried form. To dry Basil cut the stems at soil level and dry them in a dehydrator or hang bunches of stems 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 then store them in a dry airtight container for up to 12 months.

## Varieties

The most popular variety of Basil is Sweet Basil and this is the variety most often used in cooking. Other varieties include Purple Basil (purple leaves) and Lemon Basil (a mild lemon flavour).

## Diseases

Basil can help to discourage the fruit fly. Basil is often a target of slugs.

## Health Benefits

Now, onto the next reason we love basil, the health benefits. You may be thinking, "basil is just an herb, what health benefits?"

Au contraire, basil is a powerful little herb with DNA protection, anti-bacterial properties, antimicrobial properties, rich in antioxidants, anti-inflammatory benefits, diabetes, and cardiovascular health.

The volatile oils and flavonoids are of particular interest with basil, especially with the anti-bacterial properties. It's been shown to help fight off bacterial infections caused from *Escherichia coli* O:157:H7, *Yersinia enterocolitica*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Shigella sonnei* and *Shigella flexneri*, and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*.

The components found in basil help protect the structure of white blood cells and chromosomes from oxygen related damage and radiation.

## Nutrient breakdown of BASIL

Vitamin K | Vitamin A | Vitamin C | Folate | Manganese | Copper | Iron | Calcium | Magnesium | Tryptophan | Flavonoids ( Orientin, vicenin) | Volatile oils (a.k.a. that strong scent basil has also is a great indicator of their volatile oil content and biochemical activity.)



## RECIPE: SPINACH BASIL PESTO

Traditional basil made with non-dairy ingredients with an added nutrient boost from spinach.

Recipe type: dip, sauce, dressing | Cuisine: Italian  
Total Time: 10 min

### Ingredients

- 2 cups fresh basil
- 2 cups organic spinach
- 2 cloves garlic
- ¼ cup raw walnuts
- 2 Tbs. hemp seeds (optional if you don't have)
- 2 Tbs. olive oil
- 2 Tbs. nutritional yeast
- 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
- ½ tsp. salt (to taste)
- fresh ground pepper (to taste)

### Instructions

1. Simply combine all ingredients into a blender until thick and creamy.
2. You may add additional olive oil to "thin" the sauce out.
3. Always add olive oil the very top layer and refrigerate to keep the pesto moist and fresh.
4. This recipe will create a thick pesto. Enjoy!