

Cleveland Seed Bank's

guide to growing

BASIL

Cultivated for over 5,000 years, basil holds mysterious origins; it is widely debated whether it began in India or China. Whichever the origin, basil soon became popular for its cold-hardiness and traveled westward where it eventually reached America in the 1600s.

'Basil' comes from the Greek word 'basileus', meaning 'king.' Basil carries many diverse cultural and symbolic meanings throughout history, with many cultures recognizing the medicinal benefits of the plant.

Latin name: *Ocimum americanum* (Sweet), *O. basilicum* (Common, Cinnamon, Thai), *O. basilicum* var. *citriodorum* (Lemon, Lime), *O. basilicum* var. *purpurascens* (Purple)

Sun: Full

Life cycle: Annual (*O. basilicum*)
Other varieties may be annual or perennial.

Direct sow or transplant: Both

Height: 12-24" depending on variety

Container Friendly: Yes



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SOW



Direct sow/transplant: Basil can be both direct sown (recommended) or transplanted.

Common mistakes: Water the soil, not the leaves, to prevent diseases. Prune often to avoid straggly basil. Fertilizing and adding soil amendments too often can affect the taste of leaves. Basil doesn't like extreme drops in temperature so keep plants protected during cold spells, especially the young seedlings in spring.

Days to germination: ~ 5-10 days,

When: Wait to direct sow basil well after danger of final frost. In NE OH, final frost is around the 2nd week of April.

Seedling Depth: ~ 1/4 inch deep.

Spacing: Sow 2-3 seeds every 1 inch, thin to one plant every 4-8 inches as basil leaves begin to overlap.

Succession sowing: Basil can be sowed again every 2 weeks. Protect later plantings from cool fall temperatures.

Companion planting: Many crops are happy to be planted alongside basil, choose plants with similar growing conditions. Tomatoes, peppers, root vegetables, and many other herbs are great companions.

GROW

Soil: Basil likes well-draining soil with a pH between 6.0-7.5. The leaves will droop to indicate it's time to water!

Staking: Basil plants will likely not get tall enough to require staking.



Containers: Basil is one of the easiest herbs to grow in containers! Thriving in 2+ gallon containers, prune often to keep your basil production abundant throughout the growing season. Water when you notice leaves drooping. Other herbs with similar growing conditions can be planted in the same container.

Pests: Prevent aphids and flea beetles by using row covers and avoiding leaf overlap.

Diseases: Watch out for fungal diseases like Cercospora leaf spot, downy & powdery mildew, Fusarium wilt, and root rot. Prevent susceptibility by watering the soil, instead of the leaves, and providing good airflow between plants.

HARVEST



Pruning is essential to prevent leggy and woody basil plants.

Basil can become bitter once flowering occurs.

Pruning: Look for new growth at the top of the basil plant, prune here to keep the lower leaves strong so they can provide nutrients for the rest of the plant.

Aim to prune every couple of weeks.

Flowering: Flowers may begin to form if left unpruned, resulting in energy going toward flower & seed production, rather than new leaf production. Remove any flowers unless you plan to save basil seeds. Remember to eat your flower prunings too!



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SAVE

Basil is insect-pollinated. Isolation is needed to prevent hybrids.



1 Wait for the basil plant to flower, allow the flowers to dry and turn brown. Clip off the dried flower stalks.



2 Spread the flower stalks over a screen and rub or thresh to separate the seeds from the plant material.



3 Further clean the seed by placing them in a bowl and swirling them around. Viable, heavier seed will separate from both plant material and smaller, nonviable seed.

4 Basil seed viable for 5 years.

Preserving the harvest: To make a pesto-like paste, first, blanch basil leaves. Then add blanched basil and a small amount of olive oil to a blender or food processor. Freeze basil paste to use during cooking later.

Basil can also be dried; grind to make a fine powder.

Get creative! Fresh basil leaves & flowers can be infused in honey, oil, or vinegar to add wonderful flavor to drinks and dishes.

TYPES

Genovese: Dark green, glossy leaves with a characteristic spoon shape. Exceptionally tender texture and sweet flavor. Excellent in sauces and cooking.

Cinnamon: Distinctive violet stems and flower bracts with lavender blooms. A great fragrant addition to ornamental displays. It's also popular in hot drinks or iced teas.

Thai: Gorgeous narrow green leaves with vivid dark purple stems and blossoms; adored by bees. Similar to sweet basil, it has a spicy anise-clove scent and flavor. Native to Southeast Asia, perfect for containers and a great addition to stir-fry!

Lemon/Lime: Narrow-leaf basil from Southeast Asia with a delightfully strong citrus aroma and flavor. Delicious with fish & in salad dressings. Infuse with vinegar or oil to easily add flavor to dishes. Flowering stalks can be added to bouquets.

Purple: Glossy deep purple leaves. This variety is striking enough to be ornamental! Delicious in vinegars or as a garnish for your favorite meals. Strong flavor well-suited to cooking.



Purple basil



Thai basil