

## How to Grow Basil

### General

Planting basil from seed is truly enjoyable. Seeds germinate slowly, a bit faster when heated from below, and basil enjoys hot weather and full sun.

### Latin

*Ocimum basilicum*, Holy basil is *O. tenuiflora*.

Family: Lamiaceae

### Difficulty

Easy

### Season & Zone

**Season:** Warm season

**Exposure:** Full sun

**Zone:** 3 to 10 - not cold hardy

### Timing

Basil grows well in containers indoors at any time of year provided you can supply enough light. For outdoor growing, sow basil seeds from mid-April to mid-May for transplanting to the garden in June, or direct sow in late-May or early June, once the soil has warmed up. Basil requires warm soil and full sun. Optimal temperature for germination: 21°C (70°F). Seeds should sprout in 5-10 days.

### Starting

Sow seeds 1cm (½") deep in sterilized seed starting mix. Basil is prone to damping off, so one seeds sprout, make sure they are adequately ventilated, and kept under very bright light. Thin to 20-25cm (8-10") apart. Using bottom heat speeds germination.

### Growing

Use any rich, loose, well drained soil. Once plants are 15cm (6") tall, pinch out the growing tips to encourage really bushy growth prior to harvest. Watch for signs of flower buds forming in mid-summer, and pinch these off to promote more foliage.

### Harvest

Frequent harvesting will prolong the life of the plant. Basil leaves have the best flavour just before the plant flowers, and if you plan to preserve some of your basil or make a big batch of pesto, this is the best time to harvest. Flowering can be delayed by pinching or clipping off new flower buds.

Tear basil rather than chop with a knife because when you chop you will notice the basil going dark. The oil stays in the leaf and does not properly flavour your food. Try to add just before serving so as to get the full aroma and effect. Cooking for any length tends to make the minty side of basil come to the forefront.

Basil is best fresh, but can be preserved by drying or by freezing. To do this, tear the leaves into small pieces and freeze small batches of them, with water, in ice cube trays. Once frozen, the cubes can be saved in zip-lock type bags and labeled for later use. This will preserve the fresh flavour of basil for up to four months.

For a large harvest, you can cut off as much as a half the plant at once.

### Seed Info

Usual seed life: 3 years.

### Companion Planting

Will improve vigour and flavour of tomatoes, planted side-by-side. Also good with asparagus, oregano, and peppers. Basil helps repel flies, mosquitoes, and thrips.



Basil

