

Harrison Township Public Library

Spice of the Month Club: Basil

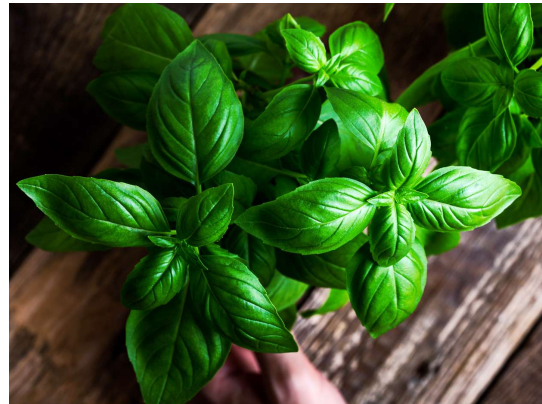
Information

Flavor Profile: Sweet, pungent and slightly spicy flavor.

History:

Basil is a culinary herb of the family Lamiaceae, or mints; and used in cuisines worldwide. Despite its association with Italian cuisine, Basil is native to the tropical regions of Southeast Asia, coming to Europe through Northern Africa and the

Middle East in 350 BC via the spice trade. In western cultures, the generic term basil specifically refers to Sweet Basil, although there are around sixty different varieties of the herb. The word Basil comes from the Latin word *basilius*, and the Greek word *basilikon phyton*, both of which mean “royal/kingly plant.”



The widespread nature of Basil has led to a variety of religious and cultural practices associated with the herb. Ancient Egyptians and ancient Greeks believed basil would open the gates of heaven for a person passing on, making it a key component of funerary rites. Jewish folklore suggests it adds strength while fasting. In Portugal, dwarf bush basil is traditionally presented in a pot, together with a poem and a paper carnation, to a sweetheart on the religious holidays of John the Baptist and Saint Anthony of Padua. Basil has religious significance in the Greek Orthodox Church, where it is sprinkled in holy water. Moreover, Basil is used in a number of folk medicine practices, such as those of the Ayurveda or in traditional Chinese medicine.

On a practical standpoint, Basil is an excellent plant to include in gardens and backyards, as it is toxic to a variety of insects, bacteria, and fungi. Studies have shown that the essential oils of basil are toxic to mosquitos and a pest which affects cowpea, a popular crop throughout Asia and Africa. The essential oil of the leaf and/or terminal shoot is effective against a large number of bacterial species including *Lactiplantibacillus plantarum* and *Pseudomonas* spp., which can negatively impact other plants in the garden. The essential oil of leaf and/or terminal shoot repels the fungal species: *Aspergillus* spp., *Candida* spp., *Mucor* spp., and *Geotrichum candidum*. Overall, Basil is a remarkable repellent for unwanted garden guests.

Basil is very easy to grow from seeds, but does prefer warmer temperatures, growing best when it can get at least 5 hours of hot sunlight each day. It is not frost tolerant, and does require a little

more water than most other herbs. Basil will also grow well in containers, or even in a small pot on a sunny window. Fresh basil leaves will only keep for around 5 days in the refrigerator. To store them, wipe the leaves with a damp cloth, or lightly rinse them under water, and place the leaves in a damp paper towel. Place the damp paper towel with the leaves in a plastic bag and then put it in the fridge. Just be careful not to bruise the delicate leaves, which causes them to turn black and die. Basil is delicious when fresh in salads, or chopped and sprinkled over baked chicken, lamb or fish. When fresh, basil imparts a sweet, minty aroma to foods. When cooked, it adds a new dimension to vegetable dishes, but of course is most famous for its use in tomato sauces. When cooking with basil, add it in during the last few minutes, to keep its color bright, and flavor lively.

Regional Stars: Basil is essential in Italian cooking, where it is used in sauces, as a garnish, in soups, and is a common component of salads. It is also used in a variety of cuisines including Thai, Indonesian and Vietnamese, where it is often incorporated into soups and salads.

Food Partners:

Complements: tomatoes, parmesan cheese, mozzarella, olive oil, pine nuts, almonds, cashews, cantaloupe, and watermelon.

Pairs well with: Parsley, lemon balm, oregano, rosemary, chives, dill, mint, and coriander.

Healing Powers: Essential oils in basil include: eugenol, linalool, and citronellol. These essential oils can help to fight inflammation in the body, which lowers the risk of conditions such as arthritis, heart disease, and bowel problems. Basil has antibacterial properties as well, so it is a great addition to soups when sick.

Recipes:

Cranberry Basil Scones

Ingredients

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
2 teaspoons fresh lemon zest
½ teaspoon salt
4 tablespoons cold salted butter, cut into pieces
½ cup dried cranberries
3 tablespoons dried or fresh basil.
¾ cup cold heavy whipping cream
½ cup plus 2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice



Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350°.
2. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.
3. In a large bowl, combine flour, granulated sugar, baking powder, lemon zest, and salt, whisking well. Using a pastry blender, cut butter into flour mixture until it resembles coarse crumbs. Add cranberries and basil, stirring to combine.
4. Add cream to flour mixture, stirring until mixture is evenly moist. (If dough seems dry, add more cream, 1 tablespoon at a time.) Working gently, bring mixture together with hands until a dough forms.
5. Turn out dough onto a lightly floured surface. Knead gently 3 to 5 times. Using a rolling pin, roll dough to a ¾-inch thickness. Using a 2-inch square cutter, cut 10 scones from dough, rerolling scraps as needed. Place scones 2 inches apart on prepared baking sheet.
6. Bake until edges of scones are golden brown and a wooden pick inserted in the centers comes out clean, 18 to 20 minutes. Let cool on a wire rack set over a rimmed baking sheet.
7. In a small bowl, combine confectioners' sugar and lemon juice, whisking until smooth. Spoon over cooled scones on wire cooling rack, and let dry before serving.

Note: Food processors are great for mixing scone dough if you have one. If you don't have a pastry cutter, you can mix the dough by hand (which I did). Whatever you decide to use, the key is not to overwork the dough. If you knead the dough too long, it will turn out like a rock, which I learned from experience when I first started baking.

<https://teatimemagazine.com/cranberry-basil-scones-recipe/>

Thai Spicy Basil Beef

Ingredients

- 2 tbs olive oil or vegetable oil
- 1 lb. ground beef 90/10
- 1 red bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 1 sweet onion, thinly sliced
- 6 cloves of garlic, minced
- ½ cup basil

Sauce

- 1 tbsp chili paste
- 2 tbsp soy sauce (If using low sodium soy sauce, add ½ tsp salt to ground beef)
- 1 tbsp fish sauce
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 2 tbsp fresh lime juice

Instructions



1. In a small bowl combine chili paste, soy sauce, fish sauce, brown sugar and lime juice until incorporated, set aside.
2. Heat oil in a large skillet set over medium high heat. Add the ground beef and cook until browned, breaking it up with a spoon and stirring often, about 6 minutes.
3. Add the bell pepper, onion and garlic to the beef and cook until vegetables start to soften, about 5 minutes.
4. Pour the sauce mixture along with the basil and continue cooking for about a minute.

Note: This is great with rice and steamed broccoli. Or, if you want it to look fancy, just get thinly cut steak instead of ground beef and “wow” your house guests.

<https://themodernproper.com/thai-basil-beef>

Classic Marinara Sauce

Ingredients:

1 28 oz. can of whole San Marzano tomatoes
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
7 garlic cloves, peeled and slivered
Small dried whole chile, or a pinch red pepper flakes
1 tsp kosher salt
¼ tsp dried oregano, or more to taste
2 tbs basil



Instructions:

1. Pour tomatoes into a large bowl and crush with your hands. Pour 1 cup water into the can and slosh it around to get tomato juices. Reserve.
2. In a large skillet (do not use a deep pot) over medium heat, heat the oil. When the oil is hot, add the garlic.
3. As soon as the garlic starts sizzling (do not let it brown), add the tomatoes and can water. Add the whole chile or red pepper flakes, oregano, and salt. Stir and let it simmer for 15 minutes until it thickens.
4. Add the basil in the last minute or two while the sauce is simmering, and let the basil sink in as you stir.
5. Serve immediately over pasta and a protein of your choice.

Note: I know most of us just prefer to get the jar of sauce, but this is in fact, much better. Also, it says to cook it for 15 minutes, but if you have more time, you can reduce the sauce for 30 or 40 minutes, just add more tomato and a tablespoon/splash of red wine or red wine vinegar for a bit more zing and to cut the thickness.

https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1015987-classic-marinara-sauce#notes_section