



Garden Notes

GN 115

BASIL

CULTURAL REQUIREMENTS

Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) is an annual or tender perennial that prefers full sun and likes rich, moist soil. Varieties grow from 8 inches to 12 feet tall. Start basil from seed sown indoors in late March or early April, or sow directly into the garden as soon as the danger of frost has passed. Basil germinates in 5 to 14 days.

Begin to harvest basil just before plants bloom and continue throughout the growing season. Remove flowers to delay seed-setting so plants continue to produce leaves that taste good. Two exceptions are Cardinal and African blue, which are grown for their flowers.

PESTS AND DISEASES

Earwigs and centipedes enjoy young basil. Handpicking is the best control. Bacterial leaf spot or a potassium deficiency may affect the older plants.

VARIETIES

Mrs. Burns' lemon basil	Annual to 12 inches. Yellowish-green pointed leaves, white flowers, and lemony scent.
Thai basil	Culinary and ornamental. Red stems, green leaves, flowers in clusters, licorice-basil aroma.
Genovese basil	Traditional Italian variety. Bright green leaf, white flower spikes. Perfect for pesto.
Purple ruffles	Culinary and ornamental. Purple leaves are large and ruffled, with scent of cloves and licorice. Light pink flowers.
Cinnamon basil	Culinary variety with a soft cinnamon flavor. Annual, 18 to 24 inches. Violet color stems, veining, and flower bracts; lavender flowers.
Lime basil	Culinary annual, 18 to 24 inches. White flower spikes, light lime flavor.
Red Rubin	Culinary, ornamental. This purple version of regular Italian large-leaf basil has a sweet scent. Coppery reddish-purple leaves. Grows 12 inches tall.
African blue basil	Shrubby form of basil that grows to 4 feet. Lovely lavender-pink flowers, more ornamental than culinary. Grow in sun or shade, but requires at least 2 to 3 hours of sun per day. Perennial, but sensitive to cold weather. For a more bushy form, prune about one-third off the top. This variety is often grown just to attract pollinators to the garden. Seeds are sterile so buy plants or propagate from cuttings.
Pesto perpetuo	Tender perennial known for its variegated lime and white foliage. This basil doesn't flower or set seeds, so buy plants or propagate from cuttings. Grows to 24 inches, columnar shape.
Spicy bush basil	Compact annual with spicy overtones. This basil is perfect growing in containers on its own or with other small herbs, such as thyme.
Cardinal basil	A bushy annual grown for its bright red "hydrangea-like" flowers, it is considered more ornamental than culinary.

April 2018, revised by Diane Schultz, UCCE Sacramento County Master Gardener. July 2004, written by UCCE Sacramento County Master Gardener Master Marina Roney. Edited by Judy McClure, UCCE Sacramento County Master Gardener Program Coordinator.

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