

Basil Growing and Preservation

Basil is a member of the mint family and is a heat-loving herbaceous annual.

To grow:

Basil grows best in full sun with temperatures between 50°F to 80°F. In Western Washington, it is best to wait until June to transplant basil into the garden. Alternatively, if you plant earlier in the season, use a cloche to protect it from cooler temperatures and rain. A cloche can be made by cutting the bottom off a plastic 1-gallon milk or vinegar container (well rinsed). Remove the cap for air flow, place over plant and secure by mounding dirt around the base to hold in place. Keep in place until nighttime temperatures are reliably above 50°F.

Basil requires six to eight hours of sun to really thrive. It does best in well-drained soil with a pH between 6 to 7. Prepare the growing location by amending the soil with aged compost, blood meal or cottonseed meal. Mix into the soil thoroughly.

Feed & Water:

Basil likes to be kept evenly moist and benefits from being fed with fertilizer around Mother's Day and again around the 4th of July. Two good fertilizer options are E.B. Stone Organic Tomato and Vegetable Food (4-5-3) or Soil Science Bloom Driver (2-5-6)

Harvest:

Once basil has six to eight leaves, you can start to harvest the leaves. Start from the top of the plant and pinch leaves off close to the stem. If you harvest the whole stem, always leave the bottom two to four sets of true leaves. The flavor is at its best when picked in the morning before the sun becomes too hot. At about six weeks, flower heads may begin to form. Pinch off to encourage continued vigor.

Companion planting:

Basil is good to grow near tomatoes either in the garden or in containers.

Pests and diseases:

Root rot from poor drainage is the biggest problem for basil plants.

Aphids and slugs are also something to watch for. Spray off aphids with a strong blast of water. Look for slugs in the early morning or evening and pick them off.

Preservation:

Basil can be dried or frozen, but for maximum flavor, freezing retains nearly all its essential oil. Place whole or chopped fresh herbs in an ice tray, cover with water & freeze. Or quickly blanch the leaves in boiling water, dry them on paper towels and freeze in sealed plastic bags.

Resources:

- West Coast Seeds "How to Grow Basil"
https://www.westcoastseeds.com/blogs/wcs-academy/grow-basil?srsltid=AfmBOopOel_96afodZSVUNTtNTDKBpJcUXXwYcj5jmKkYZzaya_dY7-M
- Univ of Minnesota – Growing Basil in Home Gardens
<https://extension.umn.edu/vegetables/growing-basil>

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