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Thursday, May 1, 2025



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# How to Grow Basil Plants: The Complete Herb Guide



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# Planting, Growing, and Harvesting Basil

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)  
Last Updated: April 24, 2025



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Basil is a wonderful herb with aromatic leaves. This compact plant is incredibly versatile, growing outside in the ground, in containers, or on a bright kitchen windowsill. You may start seeds indoors or grow from small pots. Learn the secrets to planting, growing, and harvesting basil.

## About Basil

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Basil is a member of the mint family (*Lamiaceae*) and one of the most popular culinary herbs. It's a warm-weather annual that can be planted outdoors once temperatures are consistently above 50°F.

BUY SEEDS NOW

Basil is not usually seeded directly into the soil; typically, gardeners transplant small starter plants purchased at a nursery. Or, they may start the seeds themselves indoors under grow lights.

## ADVERTISEMENT

Common or **sweet basil**, *Ocimum basilicum*, is the most common basil; other types include **purple basil** (less sweet than common basil), **lemon basil** (lemon flavor), and **Thai basil** (licorice flavor)

If you're planning on making pesto, grow several plants. For other uses, one or two basil plants yield plenty.

## Read Next

- [How to Grow a Tea Garden \(And 10 Herbs to Plant\)](#)
- [Indoor Herb Garden: How to Get Started!](#)
- [Basil Varieties for the Garden](#)

Basil will grow best in a location that gets 6 to 8 hours of full sun daily, though it can perform well in partial sun, too.

Soil should be moderately fertile and moist but well-draining. Basil works great in containers or raised beds, as these allow for better drainage. The [pH of the soil](#) should ideally be in the range of 6.0 to 7.5 (slightly acidic to neutral).

If you plan on cooking with these plants, plant in clean soil, don't use insecticides, and grow them away from driveways and busy streets so exhaust won't settle on the plants.

## When to Plant Basil

- To get a jump on the season, start the seeds indoors 6 to 8 weeks before transplanting outside. ([See local frost dates.](#))
- To plant outside, wait until the soil has warmed to at least 50°F (10°C)—preferably around 70°F (21°C) for best growth. Nighttime temperatures

- Don't rush basil. Without heat, the plant won't grow well!

**Make the Most of Your Available Space**  
See how many plants will fit and which crops can occupy the same space in your garden at different times of the year.



Basil (11 plants) - row length: 12' 6"

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## How to Plant Basil

- If you are sowing seeds directly into the ground, sow no more than 1/4-inch deep. Seeds should germinate within 5 to 7 days. Once they have developed 2 to 3 pairs of true leaves, transplant them.
- If you are planting the germinated seedlings or starter plants in the ground, spaced 10 to 12 inches apart; basil should grow to about 12 to 24 inches in height.
- A 2- to 3-inch mulch of compost or ground-up leaves retains soil moisture and minimizes weeds around the plants.
- Tomatoes make great neighbors for basil plants in the garden—and on the plate—so many gardeners will plant



*A tomato plant (center) growing alongside basil.*

## GROWING

### How to Grow Basil

- Make sure that the soil is moist. Basil plants like moisture.
  - If you live in a hot area, use [mulch](#) around the plants (the mulch will help hold in moisture and suppress weeds).
- During the dry periods in summer, water the plants freely.
- After the seedlings have produced their first six leaves, prune above the second set. This encourages the plants to start branching, resulting in more leaves for harvest.
- Every time a branch has six to eight

- Fertilize sparingly throughout the season with a 5-10-5 fertilizer.
- After about 6 weeks, pinch off the center shoot to prevent early flowering. If flowers do grow, just cut them off.
- If the weather is going to be cold or if a sudden frost is imminent, be sure to harvest your basil beforehand, as the cold temperatures will destroy your plants.



## Types

- **Cinnamon basil**, to add a hint of cinnamon to a dish
- **Purple basil** adds some nice color to your garden (when steeped in white vinegar, it creates a beautiful color)
- **Thai basil** adds a sweet licorice flavor to a dish.



[See our post about basil varieties in the garden.](#)

## HARVESTING

### How to Harvest Basil

- Start picking the leaves of basil as soon as the plants are 6 to 8 inches tall.
- Once temperatures hit 80°F (27°C), basil will really start leafing out.
- Harvest in the early morning, when leaves are at their juiciest.
- Make sure to pick the leaves regularly to encourage growth throughout the summer.
- Even if you don't need the leaves, pick them to keep the plant going. Store them for later use!
- If you pick regularly, twelve basil plants can produce 4 to 6 cups of leaves per week.

### How to Store Basil

- The best method for storing basil is freezing. Freezing will prevent the plant from losing a good portion of its

resealable plastic bags, then place them in the freezer.

- Another storage method is drying the basil (although some flavor will be lost). Pinch off the leaves at the stem and place them in a well-ventilated and shady area. After 3 to 4 days, if the plants are not completely dry, place them in the oven on the lowest heat setting with the door slightly open. Remember to turn the leaves (for equal drying) and check them frequently. [See more about drying basil, tomatoes, and paprika.](#)

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



## PESTS/DISEASES

- [Aphids](#)
- [Powdery mildew](#)
- Variety of bacterial and fungal leaf, stem, and root diseases

## WIT AND WISDOM

- Basil has a lovely fragrance. Pick from the stems and put in water for a few days as you would with cut flowers!
- For other greens to use in your cuisine, see our [Leafy Greens: Health Benefits](#) page.

*Where salt is good, so is basil.*

–Italian saying

## RECIPES

**FRESH TOMATO AND BASIL  
QUICHE**

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**FARRO SALAD WITH BASIL AND  
FETA**

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**BASIL PESTO**

**ROASTED RED PEPPER,  
MOZZARELLA, AND BASIL-  
STUFFED CHICKEN**

## COOKING NOTES

Make herbal vinegar using basil; it retains the flavor and makes a great gift! [See how to make herbal vinegar.](#)

**HERBS**



Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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# COMMENTS

ADD A COMMENT

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**Pat (not verified)** 2 weeks 6 days ago

I love my basil, for the past 2 years I have been planting it in a shady spot with only late after-noon sun and it does wonderfully. Both times the plant has reached 3 feet! So I'm guessing that's all the sun it needs.

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REPLY

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Growing microgreens. You can eat microgreens as early as eight days after harvesting and as late as twenty five days after harvesting. When harvesting a microgreen it can grow as short as three fourths of an inch or as tall as two feet tall (They are typically harvested when they are about 1 to 3 inches tall). Growing plant cuttings.

Sexual propagation This method involves growing plants from seeds, which is common for many self-pollinated and cross-pollinated plants. It is often the least expensive method and allows for long-term storage of plant material. However, it can result in genetic variation, which may not always replicate the parent plant's characteristics exactly. Asexual propagation Asexual or vegetative propagation involves using parts of a plant to reproduce new plants, ensuring the offspring are genetically identical to the parent. This method is advantageous for maintaining specific plant traits and can be faster than seed propagation. When growing microgreens choose seeds specifically labeled for microgreens. Popular options include radish, broccoli, kale, and sunflower.

Ok so I'm going to talk about basil cuttings be-

cuttings are. Later we will discuss how you should plant or replant a basil cutting. Basil cuttings are sections taken from the basil plant, specifically from the stem, leaf, or root (usually you would cut from the stem leaf and root cuttings are unusual in my science class) There are many benefits from just one basil plant!! So in order to have a cutting you must have:

1 A mother basil plant

2 Soil

3 Water

Benefits of having just one basil Mother plant:

From one plant come several plants

Takes up less space

Even one basil plant can provide a steady supply of fresh leaves for cooking use

Steps on how to plant, grow and tend to basil

First you want to choose a healthy stem from the basil plant, ideally one that is about 4 to 6 inches long. Be sure to check that the cutting has more than a few leaves.

Next you want to Use clean, sharp scissors or pruning shears to make a clean cut just below a leaf node (the point where leaves grow from the stem). Remove the leaves from the bottom half of the cutting leave a few sets of leaves at



REPLY

**Nebrija (not verified)** 3 months ago

This was great information, hopefully  
I can do this with my Basil at home!

-Nebrija

REPLY

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**Nebrija (not verified)** 3 months 4 weeks ago

Thanks for this! I love basil but I have trouble  
caring for it. Here's to some in my future  
garden!

-Nebrija

REPLY

**Nebrija (not verified)** 3 months 3  
weeks ago

Just bought some seeds for spring!

[REPLY](#)

**The Editors** 3 months 3 weeks ago

We are excited to hear how it goes, Nebrija!

[REPLY](#)

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**Mary Cates (not verified)** 11 months 2 weeks ago

I planted my basil outside and 3 of them did amazing, but 1 of them turned brown and looks dead. Do you know what happened?

[REPLY](#)

**The Editors** 6 months 2 weeks ago

Hi, Mary, Were all the basils in the same bed? Was there something different about this basil? Was it shaded by another plant, preventing sunlight? Was it crowded and affected by

well? Sometimes it's a pest or disease.

3 out of 4 ain't bad!

**REPLY**

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**Pam (not verified)** 1 year 10 months ago

Hi, I have been buying basil from my local market. These come in plastic containers in the vegetable section. Most of the leaves are lovely green, but several have purpleish or brownish portions, some in mid-leaf, some barely at the edges. I usually pluck these spots off before eating, but I am wondering if they are safe to eat, or safe but maybe a little bitter. What do you advise? What is the cause? This is organic basil harvested leaves-- not plants.

**REPLY**

**The Editors** 1 year 10 months ago

Hi, Pam. It is possible that the basil is being damaged in transport and/or packaging. If the basil does not have an "off" smell, feel slimy, or look

you are correct that it may  
taste bitter.

REPLY

MORE COMMENTS

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