

BASIL

BASIL Sweet Basil

Ocimum basilicum

Lamiaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Description

This herb is native to Central Africa and Southeast Asia. It has been used in traditional medicine as well as for food. As an annual herb, the leaves are used as a condiment, spice and its oil used in food flavorings and fragrances in perfumes and soaps. The leaves of Basil are often used as a seasoning in tomato sauces and the basis for making pesto. In the Near East, the seeds are eaten or added to bread. Seeds soaked in water make a beverage. In traditional medicine, it has been used for headaches, coughs, diarrhea, and constipation. There are sweet Basils, Purple Foliage Basil and Basils with lemon, licorice and cinnamon aroma.

Cultivation

- Elevation: 0-2500m (8200ft)
- Light: full sun
- Rainfall: 600 to 4200 mm (24-164 in)
- Soil: will grow in alkaline or acidic soils; prefers well-drained conditions
- Temperature: 7-27° C (44-80° F); frost sensitive It has a wide pH range of 4.3-8.2.

Basil will tolerate dry soil better than most herbs. Plant the seeds only about 0.3 cm (0.1 in) deep and about 15-30 cm (6-12 in) apart. The plant will grow about 50-60 cm (20-24 in) in height. The growing tips and flowers should be pinched off in early spring to encourage new growth. Basil can be grown as a potted, indoor plant if it has plenty of strong light. Several types of herbs planted together seem to produce more leaves than each one potted separately. Growing tips, 7-8 cm (3 in) can be rooted in water that is changed daily. The plant dies shortly after it sets seed, but can be kept longer if the spike buds are cut.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Leaves of the Basil plant can be harvested at any time being sure not to take more than 10% at one picking. Spray the leaves lightly with water before harvest and do not wash them after picking. Dry the leaves away from direct sun in one layer with good air circulation. Store fully dried leaves in a sealed jar. Italian Large Leaf Basil will take longer to set seeds. To save seeds, leave the plant in the ground until its seed pods start to dry. Pull up the plant and hang it upside down in a cool, dry, location with a container underneath to catch seeds as they dry and fall off. When pods are very dry, shake the plant over the container to release the rest of the seeds; store in a sealed jar. To use the leaves for oil, cut the leaves and let dry for 1-3 days and then start the distilling process.

Pests and Diseases

Most soft-bodied insect pests of Basil can be discouraged by a soapy-water spray. Hand pick large insects. Rinse leaves while still on the plant before cutting.

Cooking and Nutrition

Varieties of Basil such as the Italian Large Leaf, make excellent pesto, an Italian paste of Basil, garlic, cheese and pine nuts served over pasta. Fresh or dried leaves may be used in salads, marinades, soups, vinegars and marinades.