

BASIL



BASIL, native to India and Asia, is one of the most commonly used herbs around the world. It is a member of the mint family and comes in many varieties such as lemon basil and cinnamon basil. Some varieties vary in color ranging from dark red to green, and even purple! Basil is a hot weather crop that matures in the summer along with tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers.

STORAGE

- ◆ Temperatures below 48°F will cause basil to blacken and wilt.
- ◆ **For best storage**, cut the bottoms off of the stems and place the bunch of basil in a glass of water on the counter top. Basil can keep for up to week this way.
- ◆ There are two methods **for freezing basil**: 1) Wash, rinse and pat dry and then put it in a plastic zip-lock bag. Remember to remove the air from the bag before sealing. 2) Break the leaves off of the stem and pack them into an ice cube tray. Fill the tray with water or olive oil and freeze it. You can add a frozen basil cube to a soup, stir fry, chili or other cooked dish! Freezing will cause the leaves to blacken in color but they will still be flavorful and edible.

PREPARATION

- ◆ Remove leaves from stem and wash and dry well. Tear or cut leaves to add to dishes right before using to avoid discoloration.
- ◆ Basil tastes great **raw or cooked**.
- ◆ Use it to flavor **green salads, pasta salads and other cold dishes**.
- ◆ Add a layer of basil to **sandwiches** instead of lettuce.
- ◆ Basil goes well with other summer vegetables like tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, and summer squash like zucchini.

Pesto is a pasta sauce made from ground basil leaves, olive oil, garlic, cheese, and nuts. It is probably one of basil's most famous uses. Pesto is delicious on pasta, in omelets, used as a spread on bread, crackers, or pizza.

Nutritional Information

Basil is high in vitamins A and C. Vitamin A is important in vision, growth and development, skin health, immune function and reproduction. Vitamin C is important in immune response, wound healing, and allergic reactions. Vitamin C also helps with iron absorption.

Basil Recipes

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Pesto Sauce (Makes 1-1/2 cups)

- 2 cups packed fresh basil, washed and well-drained, stems removed
- 6 large cloves garlic, cut in quarters
- 1/2 cup parsley, washed and well drained, stems removed
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1 1/2 cups Parmesan or Romano cheese, grated
- 1 Tablespoon pine nuts (or 1/4 cup sunflower seeds)



Put basil, garlic, and parsley in a blender. Start blending, then gradually add oil. Using a rubber spatula, push the pesto sauce down from the sides of the blender as needed. Add cheese and nuts, blend until well combined. Spoon 1 cup pesto over 1 pound cooked pasta. Toss quickly with two forks and serve with additional pesto and cheese. Leftover pesto can be covered and refrigerated for up to a week. Pesto is also delicious on bread, crackers, soups, salads, pizzas or broiled fish/chicken.

If you would like to freeze the pesto — do not add the cheese when preparing. Wait until you want to use it, defrost it and then add the cheese. The surface of the frozen sauce will darken when exposed to air, so stir well before serving.

Ramatuelle Pasta Sauce (Serves 4)

- 1 pound pasta
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1/3 cup onion, chopped
- 1 cup fresh basil, packed
- 5-6 large, ripe tomatoes, cut into quarters
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- Salt to taste
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- Parmesan cheese



Boil salted water in a large pot and add pasta (cook according to instructions on box.) Meanwhile put the garlic, onions, basil and tomatoes in a blender or food processor and mix them. Add the oil, salt and pepper and blend until smooth. Set the sauce aside until pasta is cooked (sauce is served at room temperature.) Drain the pasta and toss it with some of the sauce in large bowl. Top the pasta with the rest of the sauce and some Parmesan cheese and serve.

Basil Butter (Makes 2/3 cup)

- 3 cups fresh basil leaves, washed and finely chopped
- 1/2 cup butter, softened (leave out at room temperature before using)
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice



In a bowl mix all of the ingredients together. Once combined pack the mixture into small containers and freeze. It will keep for up to 6 months in the freezer. This butter is delicious on sandwiches, warm, crusty bread, pasta or steamed vegetables.