

# What to do with Basil?



## Quick Facts

**Family:** Lamiaceae

**Genus:** *Ocimum*

**Commonly used species:**

*Ocimum basilicum* - sweet basil

*O. tenuiflorum* – holy basil

*O. xcitriodorum* – lemon basil

*O. americanum* L. – hoary basil, American basil

**Propagation:** seeds or cuttings

**Soil:** Grows in a variety of soils, does best in a light, well-drained, fertile soil

**Light:** Full sun, minimum of 6 hours

**Water requirements:** high to medium

**Fertilizer:** A balanced fertilizer can be applied lightly in the spring. A nitrogen rich fertilizer (i.e. bloodmeal) works better for later in the season. Fertilize plants after harvesting or a heavy pruning.

**Pruning:** Prune basil often as it will help the plant stay healthy and encourage more frequent harvests. Prune basil the first time above the second set of leaves. Plants should be pruned every three to four weeks after that. Allowing basil to flower will halt leaf production.

## Harvesting

Harvest early in the morning before the intense afternoon sun or harvest in the evening. If you need only a few basil leaves for dinner harvest as needed. Basil can be used fresh or preserved for use later in the year.

## Storage/Preservation

**Drying** – Drying is not the preferred method for basil since the drying process may affect the flavor. Cut the stem before the plant flowers and strip off the leaves by running your thumb and forefinger down the stem. Dry the leaves whole for the best flavor. Put the basil in a dark location with good air circulation. Once the leaves are dry store them in an airtight container that is kept away from heat and light. Basil can also be dried by gathering it into a small bunch and hanging it upside down in a dark place. To prevent your basil from losing its color try drying it between two sheets of newspaper and placing it on a wire rack. Turn the leaves once or twice a day until they are dry.

**Freezing** – Freezing is the preferred storage method for many basil lovers. Place wax paper on a cookie sheet or baking pan and then place the whole leaves on it for freezing. Afterwards, wrap the basil in the wax paper and store in plastic containers or freezer bags. Leaves can also be chopped up and frozen in ice cube trays. They may be combined with olive oil, made into pesto, or frozen with a small amount of water. Be sure to label your bags in order to identify them later.

**Oil Concentrate** - Madalene Hill recommends storing basil using the oil concentrate method. Blend 2 C. of firmly packed fresh basil leaves with ½ c. vegetable oil. This will produce a paste that is similar to pesto. Next, freeze the mixture in ice cube trays and then store in a Ziploc bag. To prevent food poisoning always be sure to store oil concentrates in plastic or glass containers in the freezer. Concentrates can be stored safely for up to 2 years.

**Salt method** – Basil can also be stored in sea salt. Alternate layers of sea salt and basil in a glass pint jar and store in the refrigerator. Take out leaves as needed for cooking. The leaves will usually stay fresh for long periods of time and the salt can be used for cooking.

## Culinary

**\*\*Combine with other herbs:** garlic, marjoram, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, and thyme.

**\*\*Meals:** Don't limit your basil to only playing a starring role in spaghetti sauce and pesto. The herb is very versatile and can be used in a variety of dishes. The process is simple; large leaves can be torn or chopped and then added to taste. Try using smaller leaves whole.

**\*\*Add to:**

**Meats:** roast beef, lamb chops, veal, turkey, fish, and chicken

**Vegetables:** tomatoes, peas, eggplant, spinach, zucchini

**Side dishes:** potato salads, rice, stuffing, salads

**Other:** tomato sauces, barbeque sauce, vinegars, teas, drinks, and cheeses, and pesto

**Desserts:** Lemon and cinnamon basil make a great addition to desserts, basil flowers can be candied and added, or try them in sorbets.

## Links to on-line sites with great Basil recipes:

**All About.com: Homecooking**

**All Recipes.com**

**Chilled Tomato Basil Soup**

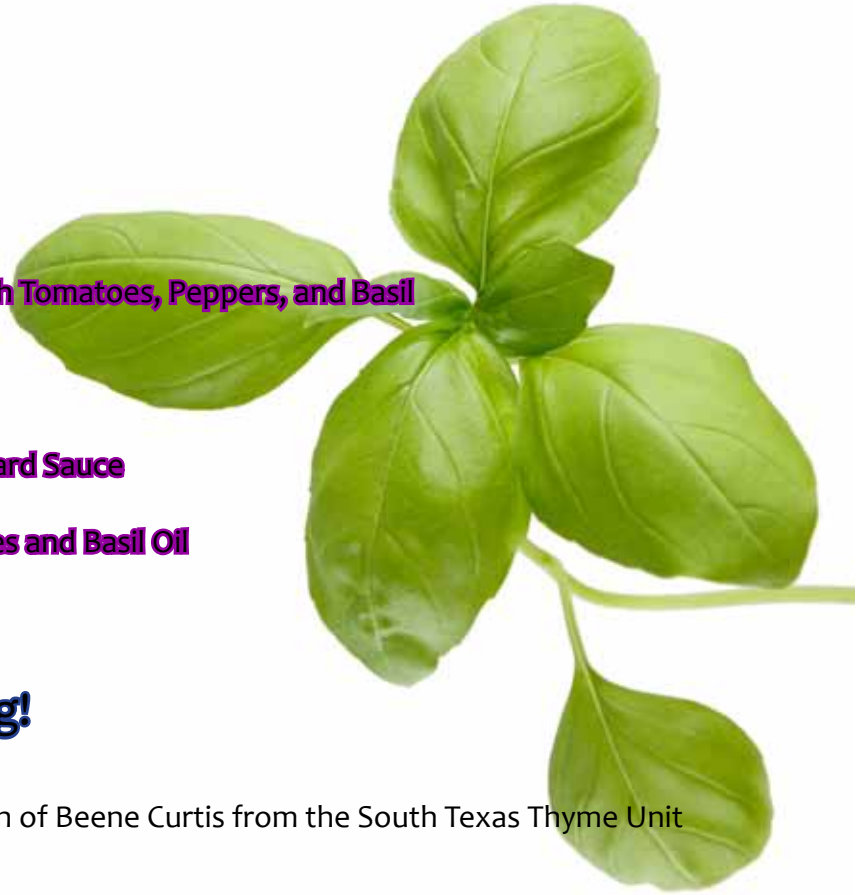
**Tomato Basil Pasta Grilled Cheese with Tomatoes, Peppers, and Basil**

**Epicurious.com**

**Lemon Snow Pudding with Basil Custard Sauce**

**Basil Flatbread with Roasted Tomatoes and Basil Oil**

**Honeydew with mint, basil, and lime**



## Recipes: Now let's get cooking!

Lemon-Basil Sorbet- Used with permission of Beene Curtis from the South Texas Thyme Unit

2 c. water, divided  
¼ c. loosely packed sweet basil (about 18 – 1 ½ inch leaves)  
1 C. plus 2 T. sugar  
Zest of 2 lemons  
1 C. fresh lemon juice (about 6 lemons)  
1 T. vodka

Purée basil leaves with 1 C. water in a blender or food processor. Blend very well until leaves are superfine. Strain leaves through a fine strainer, pressing all water from leaves, then discard leaves.

Combine 1 C. water and sugar. Mix until sugar is completely dissolved.

Combine, basil water, sugar water, lemon juice, lemon zest and vodka and chill in refrigerator overnight or until mixture is below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Freeze in sorbet maker.

### Quick Summer Harvest Salad

5 tomatoes  
2 cucumbers

4-5 basil leaves  
1 red onion

Combine into a glass bowl. Use as much or as little of each ingredient as you would like. Add basil to taste. Refrigerate for 2-3 hours to let the flavors combine. Stir and serve. A great addition to this salad is to add in mozzarella cheese that has been cut up into chunks.

## Creamy Basil Zucchini Soup (from Sunset magazine, [http://find.myrecipes.com/recipes/recipe-finder.dyn?action=displayRecipe&recipe\\_id=1728727](http://find.myrecipes.com/recipes/recipe-finder.dyn?action=displayRecipe&recipe_id=1728727))

1 T. olive oil  
1 large yellow onion  
2 lbs. zucchini, sliced ¼ -inch thick  
4 C. reduced-sodium or homemade chicken broth  
1 C. loosely packed basil leaves, washed and stemmed, plus more for garnish  
2 T. crème fraîche or use sour cream, plus more for garnish  
¼ tsp. chili powder, plus more for garnish  
Kosher salt

### Preparation

1. Heat olive oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and cook until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add zucchini and cook another 2 minutes; then add chicken broth and 1 cup basil leaves. Reduce heat to a simmer and cook 20 minutes.
2. Purée the soup in batches in a blender. Pour the soup through a strainer into a bowl, using a ladle to push any solid bits through. Add 2 tbsp. crème fraîche and 1/4 tsp. chili powder. Season with salt to taste.
3. Divide soup among bowls and garnish each with some crème fraîche, a sprinkle of chili powder, and a few basil leaves.

The Twist: Dress It Up. We love the simplicity of this soothing, mild soup, but to make it a little fancier, skip garnishing the soup with crème fraîche, chili powder, and basil in step 3, and instead halve 1 roasted red bell pepper, removing seeds and stem. Slice half into ribbons. Put the other half in a blender and purée with 1/2 cup crème fraîche or sour cream. Strain into a bowl, then drizzle over soup. Top with bell pepper ribbons and toasted pine nuts.

Notes: This soup is great served hot or cold. Try adding freshly chopped tomatoes and add bread or rolls for a light summer meal.

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