



FUN FACTS ABOUT *Basil*

Basil is in the Lamiaceae or mint family.

Place a drop or two of warm water on a basil seed and watch the gelatinous seed coat form.

The genus *Ocimum*, includes over 60 species of annuals, non-woody perennials and shrubs native to Africa and other tropical and subtropical regions of the Old and New World.

The fragrance, flavor, size, growth habit and even color vary widely among the species. The favorite culinary varieties include sweet, specialty fragrant (cinnamon, lemon, lime and Thai/anise), purple-leaved, bush, and miniature or dwarf.

Harvest either 2-4" or as much as the 2/3 of the growth at a time. Harvest frequently by cutting the stems to just above a leaf node to keep the plant healthy, prevent flowering and supply your culinary needs.

The world of basil offers a wide array of plants with a great diversity of flavors, scents, and uses. In cooking, culinary uses range from sweet to savory dishes around the world.

The essential oils derived from *Ocimum basilicum* (sweet basil) and *O. gratissimum* (tree basil) are used in commercial insect repellents.

FOLKLORE

Native to Africa and Southern India, basil is a sacred herb in the Hindu tradition and used in burial ceremonies in both India and Egypt.

The name basil comes from the Greek word "basileus" or "king". It is also attributed to the word "basilisk" a legendary dragon who could slay a person with just one glance.

Romans on the other hand, believed the fragrance of basil stimulated love. Women seeking true love merely had to hand a sprig of it to their intended and he would be forever hers. Italian men used basil in courtship as well, signaling matrimonial intent by wearing a sprig in their hair.

In the Middle Ages, basil was thought to create scorpions!

Historical medicinal uses vary across cultures. Uses have included remedies for colds, warts, melancholy, and scorpion and bee stings. Though Dioscorides', the Greek physician, pharmacologist and botanist, warned that too much basil "dulleth the sight" and is hard on digestion.

In the Victorian language of flowers, it symbolizes both hatred (common basil) and best wishes (sweet basil).

In short, basil has such varied associations including polar opposites like love and hate, danger and protection and life and death.