

# Did You Know?

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## Thai Basil, *Ocimum basilicum*

- Thai basil is not one plant, but rather a group of cultivars of sweet or Italian basil. It is distinguished by purple stems and inflorescence, narrow leaves, and an aroma that is spicier than that of sweet basil.
- ‘Siam Queen’, a cultivar named All America Selections Winner in 1997, has ornamental and culinary qualities. Its late season purple flowers appear on a bushy two-foot plant. Other varieties of Thai basil include: ‘Queenette’, ‘Thai’, ‘Thai Magic’, and ‘Sumatran’.
- Cold damage can begin when temperatures fall below 50°F so final harvest should be complete before evening temperatures fall into that range. Likewise, basil must be stored above 41° to prevent the blackened leaves of cold injury. Cut stems in water left at room temperature is ideal.
- Thai cuisine includes several types of basil including Thai basil, holy basil (*O. tenuiflorum*), and lemon basil (*O. ×citriodorum*).
- The thicker leaf of Thai basil withstands the heat of cooking a better than sweet basil and is used in soups, stir-fries, and curries. It can also be used in spring rolls, salads, salad dressings, and even in cocktails.
- Thai basil can be incorporated into ornamental plantings to take advantage of the attractive inflorescence. For improved harvest however, allow only a few stems to mature with flowers and pinch the majority back to encourage leaf growth.
- Grow Thai basil in full sun but it will also tolerate part shade. It prefers soil that is lightly moist, slightly acidic, well drained and nutrient-rich.
- Like other basil, it is best planted outdoors when the soil has warmed to 65-70°F and the evening temperatures remain about 50°F.
- The Thai basil plant can be cut back to six inches tall when harvesting.