

Basil

My go to herb – works beautifully with tomatoes and pasta (in Italian cooking) but also widely used in cuisines of Thailand and India where plants probably originated.

When cooking with it, add at the end as it quickly loses its bouquet. If you want to infuse more basil in what you're cooking it can be added early (tied in a cheesecloth bag if you want the flavor and not the texture) then add fresh leaves at the last minute or used as a garnish.

Basil oxidizes (turns brown) when bruised, cut or frozen & loses some of its flavor in the drying process. This is why many basil lovers freeze pesto to use over pasta, add to tomato sauce, or to flavor winter soups and stews. Freezing pesto in ice cube trays is a good way to access a Tablespoon or so. You can also make and freeze basil cream sauce.

To freeze leaves, rinse, pat dry & put on cookie sheet in freezer. When frozen crisp, put them in a ziplock or labeled food container. You can also make basil vinegar & basil infused oil. Or put a fresh leaf or two in an ice cube - good in a bloody Mary.

There are over 100 varieties – sweet Genovese is probably the most familiar. There are many different scented basil, – lemon, cinnamon, licorice. Also a number of small leafed globe varieties that are good for cooking as well as offering texture and scent in the garden. I grow a Thai basil called Siam Queen as a bedding flower as I think it's beautiful, and attracts pollinators. Holy basil is another good decorative variety.

Basil is a warm weather annual. Requires well drained soil but is otherwise a pretty tough, low maintenance plant. Here in GA you can seed it 2 or 3 times during the growing season. Or pinch your plant back when you see the growing tips thicken and getting ready to flower. New growth will begin from the remaining stems as long as you leave 4 leaves on the stem. If it gets away from you & does begin to flower, cut the plant back by 1/3 and it will generate new growth. You can pinch the flower buds from what you've cut off, remove the bottom leaves and stick the stems in water as long as

you have at least one set of leaf nodes in the water. Within a few weeks, they will grow enough roots to support them – take care when transplanting as water-grown roots are more fragile and easily broken than soil-grown ones. Plant them out & continue expanding your patch until first frost which spells the end for them.

Tomato basil soup

Tomato, basil and mozzarella sandwiches

On pizza

Over fresh sliced tomatoes with garlic and olive oil

In martinis

Basil Cream Sauce

- 2 C fresh basil leaves (use less if this seems too strong for your taste. Add some spinach or parsley instead)
- 4 cloves garlic minced
- ¼ C olive oil
- 2 oz. pine nuts
- ½ C grated Parmesan cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 pint light cream

In a food processor, combine basil and garlic. Begin processing and add olive oil in a thin stream. Process about 40 seconds or until mixture begins to thicken. Add pine nuts and Parmesan, then blend for 1 minute

Heat cream in a saucepan over low heat until simmering. Pour ½ of the hot cream into the processor with basil pesto and pulse for 20 seconds to incorporate. Pour mixture back into cream and simmer for 5 min. or until thickened.

Pesto

- 2 cups packed fresh basil leaves (more or less depending on your taste)
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1/4 cup pine nuts (or walnuts or pecans or combination)
- 2/3 cup extra virgin olive oil divided
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1/2 cup freshly grated cheese – Parmesan, Pecorino, Romano or similar

Combine the basil, garlic, and pine nuts in a food processor until coarsely chopped. Add 1/2 cup of the oil and process until fully incorporated and smooth. Season with salt and pepper.

If using immediately, add all the remaining oil and pulse until smooth. Transfer the pesto to a large serving bowl and mix in the cheese.

If freezing, transfer to an air-tight container and drizzle remaining oil over the top. Freeze for up to 3 months. Thaw and stir in cheese.