

Using Local Foods

This leaflet is part of a series intended as a marketing aid for farmers' market vendors.

Topics were suggested by a vendor as a means of informing and educating customers about items that could be locally grown. Herbs, spices, and condiments are the foundation of many healthful cuisines around the world. This series covers oregano, basil, hot peppers, seed spices, and cilantro—all of which are produced in the U.S. and sold at farmers' markets.

Each short, illustrated leaflet can be printed in color or black-and-white. Basic information about each food includes its history and suggested uses. Cookbooks or the Internet should be consulted for specific recipes. For more information about the Local Foods Series and local food systems, contact the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service at **1-800-346-9140** or **www.attra.ncat.org**.



Photo: Janet Bachmann, NCAT

ATTRA Local Foods Series No. 3 – Basil (*Ocimum basilicum* L.)

By Katherine Adam
NCAT Agriculture Specialist
© 2010 NCAT

Tracy Mumma, Editor
Amy Smith, Production

This leaflet is available on the Web at:
www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/localfoods3.html
or
www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/localfoods3.pdf
IP379
Slot 376
Version 112910

The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, ATTRA (www.attra.ncat.org), was developed and is managed by the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT). The project is funded through a cooperative agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Business-Cooperative Service. Visit the NCAT website (www.ncat.org/sarc_current.php) for more information on our other sustainable agriculture and energy projects.

ATTRA Local Foods Series No. 3

Basils (*Ocimum basilicum* L.)



Photo: J.S. Peterson, USDA-NRCS Plants Database

Basil Bouquet

Farmers' markets may offer many different colors, sizes, and flavors of basil. Basils common in the U.S. include Lettuce Leaf (ruffled), Italian, purple, purple ruffled, Genovese, miniature, miniature purple, Thai, white flowered, and purple flowered. There are even highly

**Experience the flavors of the world without leaving town—
enjoy local produce!**

scented cultivars available, such as Anise, Cinnamon, Licorice, Mexican spice, or Lemon. Leaves of basil, either fresh or dried, commonly appear as ingredients in Mediterranean cuisines. Anise-scented oriental basil such as Siam Queen are used in Thai cuisine.

Some Basil Background

Basil's name derives from Greek words that translate as "kingly herb." Basils are an important group of annual herbs that usually grow in warm temperate or tropical regions. Basil thrives in hot summer weather and is very sensitive to cold temperatures. Basils have many of the characteristics of the mint family, such as a square stem.

Handle with Care

Fresh basil is an ideal food to purchase from a local grower because shipping this delicate herb for long distances and storing it for any length of time are both difficult. Since the leaves bruise easily, they require special handling. Fresh basil is usually sold with leaves attached to the stems. Cut stems of basil are best kept at room temperature in a glass of water.

Grow it at Home

Potted basil can provide a summer-long source of basil for cooking, as long as the plant is pinched back to keep it from flowering. As soon as a basil plant sets seeds, the culinary quality of the leaves diminishes.

Save Some for Later

Basil is available from stores as a dried herb. You can dry your own basil leaves on trays in a warm place with low humidity, out of direct sun. Dried leaves can be stored in jars in the freezer for later use.

Enjoying the Bounty

Basil is an ingredient in many dry seasoning mixes. Home food processors can easily produce coarse to fine grinds of basil for mixing your own seasoning. Basil can

also be used to create flavored seasoning oils, although there are serious food safety concerns about adding leafy plant material to oils stored for any length of time. It's safest to make and use flavored oils as needed.

Basil is also the primary ingredient in pesto, the versatile sauce used on pasta, pizza, sandwiches, vegetables, and more.

Pesto

- 1 c. chopped basil leaves
- ½ c. olive oil
- 1 clove garlic
- ¼ c. grated Parmesan cheese
- ¼ c. grated Romano (or hard goat cheese)
- ¼ c. pine nuts (or chopped walnuts)
- Black pepper, to taste

Chop freshly picked basil, blend to a paste in food processor with oil and garlic. Add cheeses, nuts, and pepper. Mix thoroughly. This recipe will make 1½ cup pesto. Pesto can be frozen for later use.



Photo: S.P. Veres