



Kids IN THE Garden

UF | IFAS Extension
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~ Basil ~

GLOBAL GARDENING

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Let's travel across the world as we Global Garden

In this series of: Kids in the Garden - Global Gardening, we will explore the fun facts about herbs, vegetables and fruits in your garden. **Let's GO!**

Basil — Do you know where Basil originates?

Imagine travelers such as Marco Polo or Columbus, carrying plants, spices and other exotic treasures. Basil is an easy to grow, nutritious and flavorful herb; having been in gardens for over 5,000 years. Where did it originate? Belief is that basil came from India and traveled the globe. Ancient records show its use as far back as 807 AD in China! The Italian dish of Pesto makes us wonder if Marco Polo brought Basil back to Italy. As you garden, think about where your herb or plant came from—do that extra research to Learn by Doing!

Another Fun Fact: How many days would it take an explorer like Marco Polo to travel, walking from China to Italy? 116 Days! With no sleep!

Hunan China is 8340 miles from Italy divided by an average walking speed of 3 miles per hour divided by 24 hours. BUT you have to rest, so if we subtract 8 hours for sleeping and 4 hours for meals and rest (12 hours) it would take twice as long ... 232 days.

Turn the page to learn how to grow Basil, re-seed (propagate) and make delicious Pesto!

Growing Basil

From Seeds to Store Bought Plants

Basil — (*Ocimum spp.*) belong to the Lamiaceae (mint) family.

Different basil varieties are used around the globe and each basil's unique flavor compliments the regional dishes it can be found in. (UF/IFAS EDIS) Sweet basil is most common, while Thai basil adds a spice to Asian dishes and Mexican Spice Basil is commonly referred to as cinnamon basil. Citrusy basil—my favorite is Lime—adds zest to your dishes. Basil also is great for baking, think Lemon Basil cookies—YUM, vinegars and oil infusions, potpourris and crafts like soap making.



Siam Queen Basil in Flower, Mississippi State University



Basil is considered an annual plant but varieties can be perennial in the Florida garden. An easy to grow herb, basil provides drainage in raised beds and is easily propagated. Allowing your basil to flower (bolt) and harvesting the seeds when dry, provides a continuation of basil plants. Harvesting will allow the basil plant to continue to flourish. Basil loves the sun and a well drained, moist soil. Great for container, hanging and kitchen gardens.

When planting by seed you will need to allow 10 inches. Many varieties can be planted but planting them too close together and allowing to seed, will cause cross-pollination with your plants and you will have less distinct flavors. At least 150 feet apart is recommended, so different areas of your yard is best. Even using in an edible landscape is a fun idea. Plant one variety on the porch, one in the garden, one or two on the kitchen window sill is ideal. Regular harvesting allows the plants to stay compact and branch out with new growth. Allowing a few to flower at different times for the seeds, will reduce the cross-pollination.

For more information on Basil, refer to the University of Florida (UF)/ Institute of Food and Agriculture Science (IFAS), Electronic Data Information System (EDIS). A link is below for quick reference. Just copy and paste to go directly to the webpage.

Pesto — with Walnuts (optional) from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

Recipe courtesy of Tim Chin - Makes about 1 cup

Ingredients:

- 1 cup packed parsley (*optional, I omitted*)
- 1 cup packed basil
- Salt (*light - too taste, I omitted*)
- ¼ cup walnuts (*optional, Traditional Pesto uses Pine Nuts*)
- ¼ cup (½ ounce) parmesan cheese
- 3 cloves garlic (*garlic powder is fine, less is better*)
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil (*or any oils: I used a sunflower, olive oil*)

Note: I used a different recipe as basic guideline and adjusted. Using just basil, oil, light garlic powder, blended. Cheese (*optional nuts*) can be added to finished dish. For the taste testing, I used rigatoni for the pasta.) Kim B.

Preparation:

1. Fill medium bowl with ice water. Bring 2 quarts water to boil in large saucepan over high heat; add parsley, basil, and ½ teaspoon salt, return to boil, and cook until herbs are bright green and wilted, about 45 seconds. Drain herbs in fine mesh strainer and transfer immediately to ice water. When herbs no longer feel warm to touch, drain in strainer again and dry thoroughly with paper towels. Transfer herbs to bowl of food processor (break up herbs with fingers to distribute evenly).
2. Add walnuts, parmesan, garlic, pepper, and 1/2 teaspoon salt to food processor and pulse until finely ground, about 20 pulses. With processor running, add oil in steady stream until mixture is smooth and combined, 1 to 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer pesto to airtight container until ready to use (pesto can be stored in refrigerator for up to one week).

Nutrition facts: 1/4 cup 325 calories; 4 grams of protein; 4 grams of carbohydrates; 1 gram of fiber; 195 milligrams of sodium; 167 milligrams of potassium; 35 grams of fat (5 grams of saturated fat; 21 grams of monounsaturated fat; 7 grams of polyunsaturated fat) 5 milligrams of cholesterol

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References

- Harvard T.H Chan (n.d.) <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/walnut-pesto/>
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