



# GROWING BASIL

*With over 60 cultivars, basil is one of the most popular herbs. It's typically renowned for its uses in Mediterranean and South Asian cooking but is popular all over the world. All parts of the aromatic stems and leaves can be used. Its light, fresh flavour that sits somewhere between savoury and sweet is a must for all pesto lovers.*

## Seed Sowing

Basil seeds are best sown indoors; it is not hardy and will benefit from being grown in a greenhouse, polytunnel, or sunny windowsill. The plants have a long growing season but can be sown successionally for regular harvests starting in February. Sow thinly and cover with vermiculite in pots or modules in a heated propagator or on a warm sunny windowsill. Once true leaves show you can pot on several plants together.

## Transplanting

Choose a sheltered sunny site; prepare the area by removing weeds and adding organic matter before planting once temperatures are reliably around 15 degrees. Harden off your plants if going outside. Transplant your seedlings into their final growing position in rows 20 cm apart.

## Plant Care

Ensure ground has enough organic matter to retain moisture and keep well-watered. Cut back to encourage more bushy growth and protect from slugs and snails. Cut back flowering stems to keep leaf production up. You can let them flower; the bees and other pollinators do love them.

## Challenges

Slugs and snails really like young Basil plants. If these are a problem in your garden, sow indoors and plant out when larger. Encourage slug predators like ground beetles, lizards, slow worms and, if you're lucky enough, hedgehogs into your garden by creating wildlife habitat.

## Harvest

Harvest once established and leaves are plentiful. Cut the top growing tips to encourage bushy growth and keep picking regularly to discourage flowering, successional sowings will lengthen the harvest time.

## Culinary Ideas

Basil is a fragrant fresh herb with an unmistakable aniseed note. There are many different varieties including cinnamon, lemon, Thai, Greek, red and the classic sweet Genovese. Best added to meals at the end of cooking. Classic dishes are pesto, Thai green curry, Caprese salad (tomato, basil and mozzarella). Basil is high in vitamin C, B6, manganese and iron. .

## Seed Saving

For a good seed harvest, grow plants early in the season, as they need a long time to reach maturity. Space them a little further apart to give them room to grow.

Once flower stalks start to turn brown, cut them off and place them inside a paper bag. Leave them to dry and the seeds should fall out into the bag. Store in a cool dark place; seeds should remain viable for around 5 years.