

# Fluvanna County Public Library

## Spice of the Month Club

### Basil

**Flavor Profile: warm, peppery and clove-like with underlying mint and anise notes**

Today, basil is one of the most widely-used culinary herbs in the world. With so many culinary uses from basil pesto to homemade spaghetti sauce and savory desserts to fresh fruit salads, basil runs the gamut in the kitchen.

Basil, *Ocimum basilicum*, still reigns today as the King of Herbs. Its royalty was established by the Greeks, when they gave the herb its name based on the Greek word *basilikon*, meaning “king.” Alexander the Great is said to have brought basil to the Greeks. According to legend, St. Helena, the Emperor Constantine’s mother, followed a trail of basil leading to the remains of Jesus’ cross. Since that time, basil has been considered a holy herb in Greece. Basil is used in the Greek Orthodox Church for sprinkling holy water, while some Greeks bring their basil to church to be blessed and then hang the sprigs in their home for health and prosperity. However, on the isle of Crete, basil somehow gained a bad reputation and was thought to be a symbol of the devil. There seems to be a thread of bad history associated with basil since early times.

Although named by the Greeks, basil originated in India 5,000 years ago. In India today, the herb is considered a sacred herb. Holy basil, *Ocimum tenuiflorum* (also known as *tulsi*), is considered to be the manifestation of the goddess Tulasi, wife of Krishna. It is thought to have great spiritual and healing powers. According to legend, only one leaf of *tulsi* can outweigh Vishnu’s power. Every devout Hindu home will have a special place for a *tulsi* plant. It is believed that the creator god, Brahma, resides in its stems and branches, the river Ganges flows through the plant’s roots, the deities live in its leaves, and the most sacred of Hindu religious texts are in the top of holy basil’s branches. Nurturing a *tulsi* plant ensures that a person’s sins will be forgiven and everlasting peace and joy will be had. The dried stems of old holy basil plants are used to make beads for Hindu meditation beads.

From India, basil spread to Egypt, where the herb was used for embalming and has been found buried with the pharaohs. The herb then moved on to Rome and southern Europe, where the Romans fell in love with it. In Italy, basil was considered a sign of love. Italy became the home of pesto, which basil has made famous. “Pesto was created by the people of Genoa to highlight the flavor of their famous basil. Using a mortar and pestle, they combined simple ingredients to make one of the world’s most famous pasta sauces.” The simple sauce contains only basil, pine nuts, olive oil, garlic, and *parmigiano-reggiano* cheese. Pesto is still a very popular sauce for pasta or crackers, especially in the summer, when fresh basil is plentiful.

During the Middle Ages, they believed that in order to get basil to grow, one had to curse and scream while planting the seed. This is the origin of the French verb *semer le basilic* (sowing basil), which means “to rant.” It was also thought that if you smelled basil too much, scorpions would enter your brain. Today, the French call basil *l’herbe royale*, “the royal herb,” and pots of it are found in outdoor restaurants, not to deter scorpions but to deter mosquitoes. Fresh basil leaves are used to make *pistou*, the French version of pesto.

Basil, a sun-loving member of the mint family, is an annual herb that thrives in summer heat. In fact, it will languish if planted in the garden before temperatures reach a consistent 70 plus degrees. Frequent harvesting of the leaves before flowers appear prolongs its growing season. It can be propagated by seed or cuttings.

Basil is not usually considered a medicinal herb, but it was used medicinally in the time of Hippocrates who prescribed it as a tonic for the heart and to treat vomiting and constipation. Pliny the Elder commented that it was good for lethargy and fainting spells, headaches, flatulence, and other digestive issues. China and India have a long history of using basil as a medicinal herb as well.

Basil does contain a healthy amount of vitamins A, C, and K and has antioxidant and antibacterial properties, which helps fight disease. Studies show that it can help reduce blood clots by making the blood less “sticky.” Animal studies suggest that it might help slow the growth rate of some types of cancer.

So, do enjoy fresh basil this summer. Remember to dry some for the winter, freeze the leaves, or combine chopped leaves with water and freeze in an ice cube tray for later use. However, you should take careful consideration before putting basil on your windowsill lest you attract an unwanted suitor.

### **Creamy Chicken, Broccoli and Rice Bake (6 servings)**

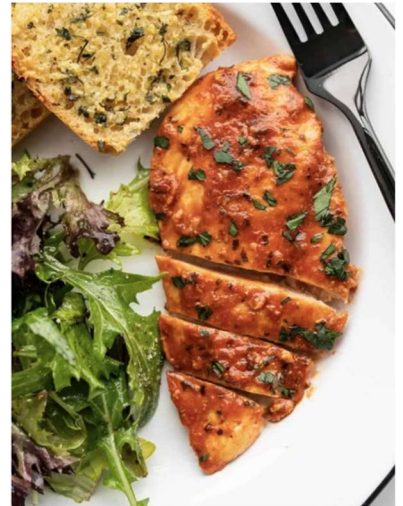
- 2 cups cooked chicken, shredded
- 1 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- ¼ tsp. dried basil
- 2 Tbsp. grated parmesan cheese
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 ½ cups shredded cheddar cheese, divided
- 1 ½ cups chicken broth
- ¼ cup bread crumbs
- 1 ½ cups instant rice, uncooked
- 10 ½ oz. condensed cream of chicken soup
- 4 cups broccoli florets
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ tsp. dried oregano
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped



1. Preheat oven to 375F.
2. In a large oven-safe pot or Dutch oven, melt unsalted butter over medium heat. Add finely chopped onion and cook until tender, about 4 minutes.
3. Add minced garlic and cook just until fragrant, about 30 seconds.
4. Stir in the condensed cream of chicken soup, chicken broth, uncooked instant rice, broccoli florets, shredded chicken, dried oregano, dried basil, salt, and black pepper. Mix well.
5. Bring the mixture to a boil, then cover and remove from heat. Let it sit undisturbed for 5 minutes, allowing the rice to cook.
6. After 5 minutes, uncover and stir in sour cream, 1 cup of shredded cheddar cheese, and grated parmesan cheese.
7. Sprinkle the remaining ½ cup of shredded cheddar cheese and bread crumbs evenly over the top of the casserole.
8. Bake uncovered in the preheated oven for 20 minutes, or until heated through and the cheese is lightly browned.

### Tomato Basil Chicken (4 servings)

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 Tbsp. red wine vinegar
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. dried basil, divided
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 1/8 tsp. freshly cracked black pepper
- 1.3 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken breast
- ½ cup chicken broth
- 2 Tbsp. tomato paste
- ¼ tsp. sugar



1. In a small bowl, combine the olive oil, red wine vinegar, minced garlic, ½ tsp dried basil, salt, and pepper.
2. Use a sharp knife to fillet the chicken breasts into two thinner pieces each.
3. Place the chicken breast pieces in a shallow dish and pour the marinade over top. Flip the chicken a couple of times to make sure all surfaces are coated. Marinate the chicken for 30 minutes, or up to one day (refrigerated), flipping once or twice throughout.
4. Heat a large skillet over medium. Once the pan is hot, transfer the chicken pieces to the skillet. There should be enough oil from the marinade to prevent sticking. Cook the chicken for about five minutes on each side, or until golden brown and cooked through, then remove it to a clean plate.
5. Add the tomato paste, chicken broth, the remaining ½ tsp dried basil, and sugar to the skillet. Use a whisk to combine the ingredients and dissolve any browned bits off the bottom of the skillet.
6. Let the sauce simmer over medium-low heat for about five minutes, or until slightly thickened. Return the chicken to the skillet and spoon the sauce over top. Serve and enjoy.

<https://www.budgetbytes.com/tomato-basil-chicken/>

### Pantry Pesto With Dried Basil (Makes 2 cups)

- ½ cup dried basil
- ½ cup dried parsley flakes
- ¼ cup whole walnuts (chopped)
- ¼ cup whole almonds (chopped)
- ¾ tsp. garlic powder (or 1-2 cloves garlic)
- ¼ cup nutritional yeast
- ½ tsp. diamond crystal kosher salt (use half as much of another brand)



1. Combine nuts in the bowl of a mini food processor. Process on low speed, pulsing on and off, until finely chopped.
2. Add the rest of the ingredients — basil, parsley, nutritional yeast, and salt — and pulse a few more times until you have a fine powder.
3. Transfer to an airtight container and store in a cool, dark place for up to 3 months at room temperature, or up to 6 months in the fridge or freezer.

4. To make this without a food processor: Chop the nuts very finely with a knife. Or place them in a bag and run a rolling pin over them to crush them and then chop them until they're as small as you can get them. Stir the remaining ingredients in with the chopped nuts.
5. Serving option 1: Toss with cooked pasta, chicken/protein/veggies along with a large glug or two of olive oil, enough to get the dried pesto mixture to stick.
6. Serving option 2: Cook pasta according to al dente package directions. Reserve ½ cup of pasta water, strain pasta and return to pan over medium heat along with any veggies/chicken/protein. Add a glug of olive oil, a few tablespoons of the pesto blend, and half of the reserved pasta liquid. Add ½ cup grated parmesan cheese and stir until the pesto uniformly coats the pasta in a sauce. Add additional pasta water if needed to thin out the sauce.

<https://thepracticalkitchen.com/pantry-pesto/>

### **Layered Spring Vegetable Casserole (Serves 10)**

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 tsp. whole thyme Leaves
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. ground black pepper
- 3 Tbsp. grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 Tbsp. panko bread crumbs
- 1 tsp. basil Leaves
- 2 cups baby carrots
- 1 pound asparagus, trimmed and cut into 5 to 6-inch spears
- 1 package (8 ounces) sliced mushrooms
- 2 cups frozen peas, thawed
- 4 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled



1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Mix olive oil, garlic powder, thyme, salt and pepper in small bowl. Set aside. Mix Parmesan cheese, panko and basil in another small bowl. Set aside.
2. Arrange carrots in single layer in 11x7-inch baking dish sprayed with no stick cooking spray. Brush carrots with some of the olive oil mixture. Layer with mushrooms and peas, brushing with olive oil mixture after each layer. Arrange asparagus on top in a diagonal pattern. Brush with remaining olive oil mixture. Top with bacon. Sprinkle panko mixture evenly on top of bacon.
3. Bake 35 minutes or until vegetables are tender and topping is golden brown. Let stand 5 minutes. Serve.

<https://www.mccormick.com/recipes/salads-sides/layered-spring-vegetable-casserole>

### **Sweet Cantaloupe Salsa**

- 2 cups cantaloupe, diced
- ¼ cup sweet Vidalia onion, diced
- 1 Tbsp. dried, fresh Basil
- 1 fresh hot red or green chile pepper, minced with seeds removed





- 1 Tbsp. fresh lime juice

1. Combine all ingredients and refrigerate at least 20 minutes. Serve

<https://spicesinc.com/recipes/sweet-cantaloupe-salsa>

### California Three Bean Chili (6 servings)

- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 green bell pepper, coarsely chopped
- 1 can (15 ounces) black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (15 ounces) red kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (15 ounces) great Northern beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) diced tomatoes
- ½ cup dry red wine
- 4 tsp. McCormick® Chili Powder
- 2 tsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 tsp. basil Leaves
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 tsp. oregano Leaves
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. ground black pepper



1. Heat oil in large saucepan on medium-high heat. Add onion and green bell pepper; cook and stir 5 minutes.
2. Stir in beans, tomatoes and remaining ingredients. Bring to boil. Reduce heat to low; simmer 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

<https://www.mccormick.com/recipes/main-dishes/california-three-bean-chili>

### Easy Homemade Pizza (6 servings)

- 1 prepared pizza crust (12-inch)
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- ¾ cup sliced zucchini
- ¾ cup red bell pepper strips
- ½ cup sliced mushroom
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- ½ tsp. basil Leaves
- ½ tsp. oregano Leaves
- ¼ tsp. garlic powder
- ¼ tsp. crushed red pepper
- ¼ cup sliced black olives



1. Preheat oven to 450°F. Place pizza crust on large baking sheet. Mix mozzarella and Parmesan cheeses in small bowl. Spread 1/2 of the cheese mixture over crust.
2. Toss vegetables, oil, basil, oregano, garlic powder and crushed red pepper in medium bowl. Spread mixture evenly over crust. Top with remaining cheese mixture and olives.
3. Bake 8 to 10 minutes or until cheese is melted. Cut into slices to serve. Sprinkle with additional crushed red pepper, if desired.

<https://www.mccormick.com/recipes/main-dishes/easy-homemade-pizza>

### **Basil & Garlic Tortellini (Serves 6)**

- 1 package (8 ounces) cheese tortellini
- 1 Tbsp. oil
- 1 package (8 ounces) sliced mushrooms
- 1 can (14 ½ ounces) diced tomatoes, undrained
- 2 tsp. basil Leaves
- ¼ tsp. garlic salt
- ¼ tsp. ground black pepper
- 2 Tbsp. grated Parmesan cheese



1. Cook tortellini as directed on package. Drain well.
2. Meanwhile, heat oil in large skillet on medium-high heat. Add mushrooms; cook and stir 5 minutes. Stir in tomatoes, basil, garlic salt and pepper. Bring to boil, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to low; simmer 5 minutes. Add tortellini and cheese; toss to coat well. Sprinkle with additional cheese, if desired.

<https://www.mccormick.com/recipes/main-dishes/basil-and-garlic-tortellini>

### **Zesty Chicken Avocado Bacon Wraps (5 servings)**

- 1/3 cup mayonnaise
- ½ tsp. dried basil
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tsp. lemon juice
- WRAP
- Shredded Romaine Lettuce
- 2 cups shredded romaine lettuce
- 8 Inch Flour Tortillas
- 5 whole 8 inch flour tortillas
- 5 slices bacon
- 1 large chicken breast, cooked and shredded
- 1 whole avocado, diced



1. In a small bowl, whisk together mayonnaise, dried basil, lemon juice, salt, and freshly ground pepper.
2. In a large nonstick skillet, cook bacon until crispy, about 8 minutes, then transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain.
3. In a large bowl, toss together shredded lettuce, diced avocado, cooked bacon, and shredded chicken.

4. Pour the dressing over the salad mixture and gently toss to coat evenly. Adjust seasoning if needed.
5. Place a heaping spoonful of the filling on the center of each tortilla.
6. Fold in the sides of the tortilla and roll up tightly. Cut in half diagonally and serve immediately.

<https://cooklist.com/recipe/zesty-chicken-avocado-bacon-wraps-2705562>

### **Savory One-Skillet Beef and Pepper Medley (6 servings)**

- ½ tsp. dried basil
- 1 lb. lean ground beef
- ¾ cup long grain white rice, uncooked
- ¼ cup onion, finely diced
- ½ tsp. dried oregano
- ½ tsp. salt
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cups water
- 2 Tbsp. tomato paste
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- 1 ½ cups shredded cheddar Colby blend cheese
- 1 cup green bell pepper, diced
- 1 handful fresh parsley, chopped
- 14 ½ oz. canned fire roasted diced tomatoes



1. Heat a large skillet over medium heat and add ground beef and onions. Cook until beef is browned and onions are soft.
2. Discard any excess fat by spooning it out of the skillet and onto a disposable paper towel.
3. To the skillet, add garlic and green pepper, sauté for about a minute until the garlic is fragrant.
4. Stir in fire roasted diced tomatoes and tomato paste. Cook for 2 minutes.
5. Sprinkle in dried basil and oregano, stirring well to incorporate the herbs.
6. Add uncooked rice, water, salt, and black pepper to the skillet. Stir until all the ingredients are well combined.
7. Bring the mixture to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer. Cover the skillet with a lid, and let it simmer until rice is fully cooked, about 20 minutes.
8. Fluff the rice using a fork. Turn the heat down to low.
9. Spread shredded cheese evenly on top of the dish. Cover with the lid again and let it sit until the cheese is fully melted.
10. Before serving, sprinkle fresh chopped parsley over the melted cheese. Enjoy!

<https://cooklist.com/recipe/savory-one-skillet-beef-and-pepper-medley-2724656>

### **Basil & Garlic Vegetable Pasta with Balsamic Vinaigrette (8 servings)**

- ½ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup white balsamic vinegar
- 2 tsp. basil Leaves
- 1 ½ tsp. garlic salt
- ½ tsp. pure ground black pepper



- 1 cup broccoli florets
- 1 cup sliced bell pepper
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 cup snow peas, sliced
- 8 ounces penne pasta, cooked and drained
- 8 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, cut into bite-size chunks

1. Mix oil, vinegar, basil, garlic salt and pepper in large bowl until well blended. Add vegetables, pasta and cheese; toss to coat well.
2. Serve immediately or refrigerate until ready to serve.

<https://www.mccormick.com/recipes/salads-sides/basil-garlic-vegetable-pasta-with-balsamic-vinaigrette>

#### **Light Italian Dressing (Makes 1 cup)**

- 1 medium tomato, halved
- 1 Tbsp. red wine vinegar
- 1 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 2 tsp. Dijon mustard
- Pinch of sugar
- 2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ small clove garlic, minced
- 1/8 tsp. dried oregano
- 1/8 tsp. dried basil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper



1. Rub the cut sides of the tomato along the coarse holes of a grater into a bowl; discard the skins.
2. Whisk in 1/4 cup water, the vinegar, lemon juice, Dijon mustard, sugar, olive oil, garlic, oregano, basil, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and pepper to taste.

<https://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/food-network-kitchen/light-italian-recipe-1973925>

#### **Basic Herb Vinaigrette (4 servings) from a staff member**

- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| • 1/3 cup olive oil                     | • 1 tsp. Dijon-style mustard |
| • 2-3 Tbsp. white vinegar               | • 1 clove garlic minced      |
| • 1 tsp. white sugar                    | • 1/8 tsp. black pepper      |
| • ½ tsp. dried oregano or basil crushed | • 1/8 tsp. salt.             |

1. Combine all ingredients in a jar and shake to mix, or use an immersion hand blender to incorporate them completely.
2. Store in the refrigerator for up to a week.

#### **Library Resources**

- Cool Basil from Garden to Table by Katherine Hengel – J 635 HEN
- Fast Easy Cheap Vegan by Sam Turnbull – 641.5636 TUR
- Modern Bistro: Home Cooking Inspired by French Classics by America's Test Kitchen – 641.5 AME
- Ultimate Veg. by Jamie Oliver – 641.5636 OLI