

Beloved Basil

By Kami McBride

This is the season when basil is most lush. Except for not at my house. The deer discovered my basil patch this year. I found two mamas and three babies in my patch one morning and they had pretty much feasted the basil into non-existence. I thought I planted enough for everyone, but the deer decided they wanted it all! Oh well, now I have to buy basil at the store.

The botanical name for basil is *Ocimum basilicum* which comes from the Greek word for king. Indeed in many parts of the world basil is known as the king of all herbs. Basil contains plenty of vitamins A and C and is a powerful anti-oxidant. Anti-oxidant herbs help protect your cells from damage caused by unstable molecules known as free radicals. Free radical damage can contribute to heart disease, cancer and pre-mature aging. Eating basil helps to mop up the free radical cells in your body that can be caused by stress, pesticides and environmental toxins.

Basil is also antibacterial and antiviral making it an effective remedy for the common cold and flu. Eating basil in your food and drinking basil tea is good preventive health care. Frankly, I suggest eating as much basil as you can get you hands on this time of year!

We think of basil as part of the tomato sauce or pasta dish, but a cup of basil tea works wonders for almost any digestive complaint. Basil tea relieves stomach cramps and spasms, nausea, gas and constipation. That must be why it is in so many pasta dishes, so you can eat more pasta! Basil doesn't make the world's best tasting tea, but it is not so bad, especially when you find out what it can do for your stomach.

A favorite way to eat basil is to make pesto. You can make the classic pesto with Parmesan cheese and pine nuts and you can also get creative and make pesto with many other ingredients. During the summer months in my household, pesto is the fifth food group. I like pesto with scrambled eggs for breakfast. Pesto spread on my turkey sandwich for lunch and pesto on top of any fish, chicken or pasta dish for dinner. Just eat embalming levels of pesto and no cold or flu bacteria can even get near you.

Basil is one of my all time favorite herbs. I especially love it because it is tasty in so many different types of meals. Here are some of my favorite ways to get basil into everyone who eats with me!

Classic Pesto

1 bunch chopped basil leaves
1/4 to 1/2 cup olive oil

2 garlic cloves
3 tablespoons pine nuts
3 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
Dash of salt

Cut the stems from the basil leaves and discard the stems. Put basil and olive in the blender and blend until smooth. Add nuts, garlic and Parmesan cheese a little at a time and mix until everything is blended together. Add extra olive oil for a smoother pesto

Pesto Revival

1 bunch stemmed, chopped basil leaves
½ cup combination of other chopped culinary herbs: rosemary, oregano, nasturtium leaves and flowers, savory, parsley, tarragon, thyme, arugula, sage
½ -1 cup olive oil
3 garlic cloves
4 tablespoons of nut of choice: pecans, walnuts, almonds or sunflower seeds
3 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
Dash of sea salt

Nutty Basil Salad Dressing

½ bunch of basil leaves
Sprig of chopped rosemary
Handful of chopped parsley
1 cup olive oil
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
4 tablespoons water
1 garlic clove
¼ cup toasted sunflower seeds (put plain shelled sunflower seeds in a cast iron skillet and dry roast for five minutes)
1/8 teaspoon sea salt
Dash of black pepper

Blend all ingredients except for the herbs together in the blender until smooth. Add basil leaves and other herbs a few at a time until you get the consistency of salad dressing that you like. This is my favorite salad dressing; I eat it on salads and baked chicken

Digest-Ease Basil Tea

1 cup water
1 tablespoon freshly chopped basil leaf
Put herbs and water in a pot with the lid on. Bring to a boil and then immediately turn off the heat. Let the basil steep for fifteen minutes and then strain it out. Drink one to two cups a day

Kami McBride has taught herbal medicine since 1988. Through her classes and personal wellness consultations she helps people understand how whole foods and herbal medicine are an important aspect of everyone's preventive health care plan. Kami has helped thousands of people learn to use herbs in their daily lives in ways that are healthy, safe and fun and she teaches classes in herbal medicine and women's health at her school and herb gardens in Vacaville, California. For a schedule of upcoming classes or herbal consultations Kami can be reached at (707) 446-1290 or sign up for her free herbal e-newsletter at: www.livingawareness.com