

Thai Basil



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Description/Taste

Thai basil is a perennial herb, that grows as a small, multi-branched shrub, reaching up to a foot in height. It has narrow, arrow-shaped leaves that are about half the size of common sweet basil leaves. Thai basil has purple-tinged stems, which offer a nice contrast to the bright green leaves. The leaves are aromatic and have a strong, spicy flavor with hints of licorice. Some varieties have larger leaves, and some have a purple hue. When the plant matures, spikes of lavender and deep purple flowers grow at the tops of the burgundy stems. The flowers share the same intense spice and hint of licorice flavor.

Current Facts

Thai basil is a cultivated Asian variety of sweet basil known for its spicier flavor and its ability to withstand high cooking temperatures. Botanically, Thai basil is classified as *Ocimum basilicum* var. *tenuiflorum* though it is sometimes known under the botanical name *Ocimum thyrsoiflorum*. In Thailand, Thai basil is known as bai horapha. It is sometimes confused with holy basil, which has slightly fuzzy leaves with more of a clove flavor.

Nutritional Value

Thai basil has notably high levels of vitamins K and A, as well as significant amounts of vitamin C, beta-carotene, magnesium, calcium, iron, and potassium. Basil is known for its beneficial essential oil, which contains eugenol – a natural compound that has antibacterial, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties.

Applications

Thai basil is a very common ingredient in the cuisines of Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. It is used to infuse flavor into broths and soups, like the traditional Phô (pronounced 'Fuh'), and Thai green curry. The herb is added at the end of the cooking process to retain its aroma and flavor. Add Thai basil to Pad Thai noodles, meat or chicken stir-fry dishes. Use Thai basil versus the common sweet basil for a pesto with a hint of licorice flavor. Add whole leaf clusters to cocktails and beverages like lemonade, as a garnish and aromatic. Thai basil can be used in sweet applications as well, added to fruit salads or desserts made with tropical fruits like mango. Chiffonade leaves by laying individual leaves on top of one another, rolling them up together widthwise, and then slicing into thin strips. To store Thai basil, cut the ends and place in a glass of water, much like a bouquet of flowers. It can be left on the counter this way. It is recommended that Thai basil not be refrigerated, though it can be for up to a week when wrapped in plastic. Thai basil also freezes well if washed and thoroughly dried before sealing in an airtight bag or container.