



Basil

An annual of the lamiaceae family like rosemary or sage, basil is cultivated as an aromatic plant and flavouring. The term basil comes from the greek *basilikon*, 'royal', a reference to the high esteem in which it was held.

This plant, originally from Iran or India (where it is always sacred), arrived in Europe via the Middle East during the 15th century.

Choice

Fresh basil crops in summer. It exists in a number of varieties which include small leaved (the most available in markets); large leaved; purple basil; Thai basil and more strongly flavoured basil. Basil is available fresh, dried or ground. For preference, buy fresh basil which is more aromatic, in bunches with the roots still on. The leaves should be smooth and green without any marks.

Consumption

Fresh basil flavours salads particularly well but is equally good with eggs and pasta, vegetables such as courgettes, carrots and aubergines. It is indispensable in a herb sauce such as pesto and on pizzas. It can be used as an infusion by replacing vanilla, for example, in an egg custard. Finally, basil harmonises well with sage, garlic, rosemary and thyme.

Conservation

Fresh basil keeps in a refrigerator for two days in a freezer bag or wrapped in damp kitchen paper. Dried basil, kept cool and away from



In mythology, basil is a fabulous reptile which has the power to kill with a look which could not be overpowered without the saving grace of a mirror.



Rich in calcium, vitamins A and C, basil is also a good source of phosphorus.



PREPARATION

Don't pick basil leaves until the last moment. To shred them, roll them up and cut them with a sharp knife. To prevent them turning black, it is better to cut them after drying them off on kitchen paper.



COOKING

Don't cook basil leaves, just heat them briefly.

Always add them to recipes at the last moment.



PRESENTATION

When they flower, keep the flowers for decorating your plates. You can also crystallize the leaves in a syrup for decorating desserts or make them crisp by microwaving them with a splash of olive oil for a few seconds.

RECIPE SUGGESTIONS

Water melon and basil salad sprinkled with goat cheese

Dish of strawberries with basil Chantilly

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