

Using Basil
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Plenty of sunshine and warm temperatures stimulate all of the garden plants, but the basil plant seems to enjoy the summer weather better than all the other herbs. Perhaps the plant knows how much people yearn for the fresh taste of basil in spaghetti sauces, pesto and lasagna. Perhaps it knows that its distinctive taste blends well with many Asian and South Pacific recipes. Certainly it grows quickly and vigorously in the hot California sun.

Harvesting basil could not be easier. Simply snip off the leaves needed, rinse under cold, running water, and pat dry. Then add the leaves as specified in the recipe. The plant will continue to grow, especially if cut just above a pair of leaves. The basil plant, a hardy herb, continues to produce leaves all summer and well into the fall.

While fresh basil tastes best, sometimes too much of a good thing becomes a bit of a problem. Freezing preserves more of the fresh taste of basil than drying does, and can be quite easy. Whole leaves may be frozen in small, freezer type plastic bags, and chopped leaves may be placed in ice-cube trays with a small amount of water and frozen. Freezing keeps the leaves green and fresh looking, and the herb will stay good in the freezer for up to a year.

The leaves may also be dried, but will turn a brownish color and will lose more flavor than frozen leaves. Use a dehydrator or air dry by hanging small bunches of leaves in a warm, dry and well-ventilated room. Avoid exposing to direct sunlight, and be sure to check for mold between the leaves. When the herbs dry completely, strip the leaves from the stems and store the leaves in an air-tight container. Keep the container out of the light and heat and the dried herb should stay good for a year. Be sure to look for any signs of moisture or molding, and do not use any herbs which have molded.

This delicious recipe uses fresh basil and tomatoes, two garden staples that taste great together.

Spaghetti Squash with Fresh Tomato Basil Sauce Recipe

1 spaghetti squash
4 tomatoes
4 basil leaves
1/4 cup red wine
1/4 cup water
2 tablespoon olive oil
1 clove garlic
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

Cut squash in half length wise. Bake at 375° until tender. Alternatively, you may steam the squash if preferred.

Once cooked, remove pulp with a fork leaving the squash in long strands.

Dice tomatoes and garlic.

In a sauce pan heat oil, add tomatoes and garlic reduce heat to medium. Add wine and water; let mixture simmer for 10 minutes then add thinly sliced basil.

You can either serve this sauce chunky or puree it in a blender for a smoother texture.

Place squash in the center of serving dish and surround with the sauce.

Source: University of Wisconsin Extension

Questions about safe home food preservation? Call the Master Food Preservers and leave a message at (530) 621-5506 or send an email to edmf@ucdavis.edu. A Master Food Preserver will return the call. The Master Food Preservers are also available free of charge to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for small or large groups. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/.