



# Growing Herb Series: Basil, Oregano, and Thyme

ERIKA WOOD

HOPKINS COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT FOR HORTICULTURE EDUCATION



**Martin-Gatton**  
College of Agriculture,  
Food and Environment



# The Mint Family - Lamiaceae

- ▶ Square Stems, Opposite Leaves
- ▶ Often Aromatic
- ▶ Typically have two-lipped, tubular flowers
- ▶ Flowers attract a wide range of pollinators
- ▶ Culinary and medicinal uses
- ▶ Includes different kinds of culinary herbs and ornamentals: Sage/Salvia, Mint, Lavender, Basil, Rosemary, Oregano, Thyme, Marjoram, Coleus, Bee Balm, Lemon Balm, Catnip, etc.





# What is Basil?

- ▶ *Ocimum basilicum*
- ▶ Native to parts of Asia and Africa
- ▶ Aromatic annual
- ▶ Upright species
  - ▶ Green or purple leaved varieties
  - ▶ Small and large leaved varieties
- ▶ Produces spikes of white to pink flowers
- ▶ Often spicy in smell and flavor





# Growing Basil

- ▶ Easily grown from seed or tip cuttings
- ▶ Keep well-watered in sunny location
- ▶ Prune occasionally and remove flower buds to promote bushier growth
- ▶ Great for growing indoors in a bright window
- ▶ Cold soil and air temperatures may stunt basil growth and even cause damage and blackened leaves





# Basil Uses

- ▶ Culinary herb for Italian Dishes
- ▶ Also commonly used in Indonesian, Thai, and Vietnamese cuisine
- ▶ Used in tomato sauces, pesto, vinegars, etc.
  - ▶ Great if paired with tomato and mozzarella (Yum!)
- ▶ Used as garnishes to drinks, salads, etc.
- ▶ Rich in vitamins and nutrients
- ▶ Used medicinally for gastrointestinal problems





# Types of Basil

- ▶ **Sweet Basil Group:** These are the familiar sweet scented types
  - **Napoletano** – Standard lettuce-leaved
  - **Medinette** – Compact, large leaf
  - **Romanesco** – Large leaf with strong aroma
- ▶ **Genovese Group:** Classic large leaf from the Genoa area of Italy, the pesto capital of the world
  - **Genovese** – Classic
  - **Emily** - Compact variety
  - **Dolly** – Heavy produce of large leaves





# Types of Basil

- ▶ **Bush Group:** Smaller, rounded forms often with small, finer textured foliage
  - **Spicy Globe** – Uniform and dense
  - **Green Globe** – Dense, tight globe form
  - **Bush** – Standard bush variety





# Types of Basil

- ▶ **Purple Group:** Basils with dark purple to bronze foliage. They are often very decorative
  - **Dark Opal** – Pure dark purple foliage excellent for vinegars
  - **Emerald Wine™** - Compact, wine red leaf veins surrounded by a green border
  - **Rubin** – Purple bronze foliage
- ▶ **Other Basils:** A selection of basils with distinctive flavors and aromas
  - **Cinnamon** – Distinctive cinnamon taste and aroma
  - **Lemon** – Intense lemon fragrance
  - **Clove** – Clove scented leaves
  - **Thai** – Licorice-like aroma





# What is Oregano?

- ▶ *Origanum spp.*
- ▶ Native to the Mediterranean region but widely naturalized
- ▶ Spreading and mounding perennial
- ▶ Aromatic leaves
  - ▶ Small oval to round
  - ▶ Smooth or hairy
- ▶ Produces small, white to pink flowers on spikes, panicles, or corymbs
  - ▶ beloved by bees





# Growing Oregano

- ▶ Loves heat and full sun
- ▶ Needs well-drained to dry soil
  - ▶ Neutral to alkaline pH
- ▶ Grown from seed, cutting, or division
- ▶ Trim flower buds to produce more foliage
- ▶ No serious pests or diseases
  - ▶ Occasional root rot





# Oregano Uses

- ▶ Warm, spicy flavor
- ▶ Used as flavoring in pizza, pasta, breads, soups, stews, salads, etc.
- ▶ Used as seasoning for meats such as steak or lamb
- ▶ Medicinal uses: gastrointestinal problems, antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties





# Types of Oregano

- **Greek Oregano** (*Origanum vulgare* var. *hirtum*) – True oregano, excellent flavor, hardy
- **Syrian Oregano** (*Oregano maru*) - Strong, spicy flavor
- **Turkestan Oregano** (*Oregano tyttanthum*) - Strong flavor, robust plant, good for indoor culture
- **Hopley's Purple Oregano** – Purple-green foliage, compact, mild flavor
- **Mexican Oregano** (*Lippia graveolens*) – Good oregano flavor used for chili and Mexican dishes





# What is Thyme?

- ▶ *Thymus spp.*
- ▶ Low-growing perennial
- ▶ Grown as an ornamental or for culinary uses
- ▶ Wiry stems with small leaves
- ▶ Plant becomes woodier as it ages
- ▶ Produces white to purple colored flower clusters
  - ▶ Attractive to bees and butterflies





# Growing Thyme

- ▶ Needs well-drained (dry, rocky, or sandy) soil
- ▶ Full sun
- ▶ Best grown from seed, division, or cuttings
- ▶ Trim back “leggy” plants to promote more growth
- ▶ Harvest prior to blooming





# Thyme Uses

- ▶ Used as seasoning in soups, stews, casseroles, poultry dishes, stuffing, etc.
- ▶ Oil used in soaps, colognes, deodorants, and much more!
- ▶ Insecticidal, antibacterial, and antifungal properties
- ▶ Good source of vitamins A and C





# Types of Thyme (*Thymus* spp.)

- **French and English Thyme** – Most popular of the culinary types
- **Citrus Thymes** – A diverse group of thyme that consists of plants with lemon, lime and orange fragrances
- **Woolly Thyme** – Low carpet of grey, woolly leaves and pale pink flowers





# Harvesting and Preserving Herbs



- ▶ Harvest herbs when fragrance oils are at their peak
  - ▶ Snip off usable leaves
  - ▶ Use fresh herbs within a week of harvest
  - ▶ Refrigerate and store washed herbs in airtight container
- ▶ Preserve herbs by drying, freezing, or adding to vinegars



# Preserving Herbs: Drying



1. Wash herb carefully
2. Blot dry
3. Hang upside down by stem (cover with paper bags to prevent dust)
  - ▶ **Do NOT hang in the sun when drying**
4. Once dry, strip leaves from stems
5. Store dried herbs in a dark place in airtight containers



# Preserving Herbs: Freezing

1. Wash herbs
2. Place in airtight container
3. Put in freezer for up to two months

## OR

1. Chop herbs
2. Put in ice cube trays filled with water
3. Place in freezer





# References

- ▶ <https://extension.illinois.edu/herbs/basil.cfm>
- ▶ <https://extension.illinois.edu/herbs/oregano.cfm>
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