

Horticulture

2000 Perennial Plant of the Year

Basil

Basil is one of the most popular herbs grown in the world. It is native to Asia and can be found growing wild in tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world.

Basil has many uses, the most common of which is its culinary use. As a fresh herb, it is used to flavor foods such as vegetables, poultry, and fish. Basil can also be used dried. The flowers of basil are also edible and can be an attractive addition to salads and other dishes. Besides its edibility, basil is an aromatic herb and is often used in potpourri and sachets. As an ornamental in the flower garden, basil has attractive foliage and flowers.

Basil is a tender perennial grown as an annual. It can be grown easily from seed. Start seed indoors four or five weeks before the last frost date. It likes warm temperatures (about 75 degrees Fahrenheit) for germination. Seed can also be sown directly in the ground outdoors after it has warmed in the spring. Plant basil outdoors after all danger of frost is past. Basil does not tolerate cold temperatures. Plant in full sun. Water regularly with an inch of water per week. Basil can also be propagated vegetatively through tip cuttings; root cuttings in moist potting soil.

To harvest, remove terminal growth whenever four sets of true leaves can be left on the plant. This encourages bushier growth and increased yield. For best foliage flavor, cut before flowering. After cutting, wash and pat leaves dry. Use immediately or store in perforated

plastic bags in the refrigerator. When drying the leaves, harvest early in the day after the dew has dried. Spread leaves on screens or loosely bundle and air dry.

Basil is a member of the mint family which is characterized by square stems. They belong in the genus *Ocimum*. Over 150 different species and varieties are available. These are some of the more common types of basil.

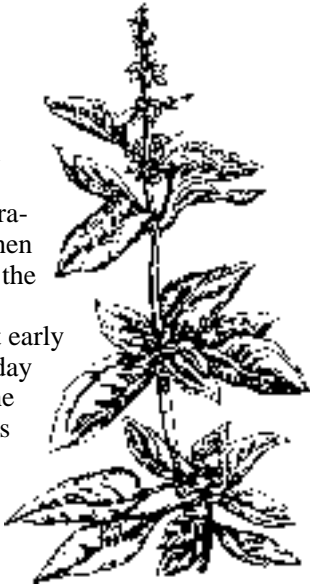
Sweet Basil
Most common type grown. White flowers. Bright green leaves, two to three inch long. Upright habit. Clove like scent.

Purple Basil
Grown for its ornamental foliage as well as culinary use. Light lavender flowers. Same size leaf as sweet basil. 'Opal,' 'Red Rubin' and 'Purple Ruffles' are excellent selections.

Lettuce Leaf Basil
Large, wide leaves. Flavor is less pronounced than other green basil. Common varieties include 'Mammoth' and 'Green Ruffles.'

Lemon Basil
Lemon scent. White flowers and small green leaves. Great for tea and potpourri.

Cinnamon Basil
Cinnamon scent. Pink flowers, green leaves with purple stem. (MJM)



The Perennial Plant Association has awarded the title Perennial Plant of the Year 2000 to **Scabiosa columbaria** 'Butterfly Blue.' A member of the Dipsacaceae family, the nearly flat gray-green foliage of the pincushion flower hugs the ground. Lacy, lavender blue, two inch flowers bloom on slender 12 to 15 inch stems from late spring through early fall. Flowering begins in mid-spring with repeated flowering throughout the growing season. Pincushion flower derives its common name from the stamens which stand above the petals resembling pins stuck in a pincushion. The leaves are hairy, ovate to lance shaped. The upper foliage is smaller and finely divided, creating a mounded rosette six to eight inches high and 12 to 15 inches wide.

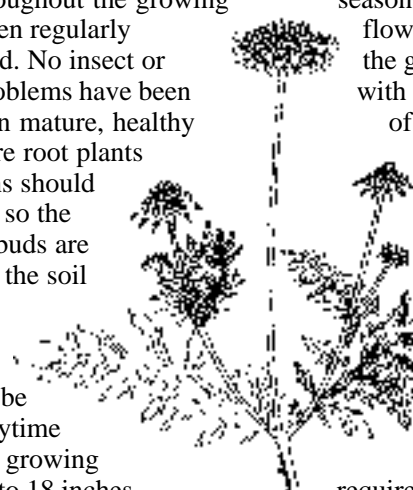
This long blooming perennial for full sun to light shade, grows best in well drained soil amended with organic matter. 'Butterfly Blue' pincushion flower requires moist soil during the growing season. This lovely

perennial does not appear to be fazed by summer heat and will bloom throughout the growing season when regularly deadheaded. No insect or disease problems have been reported on mature, healthy plants. Bare root plants or divisions should be planted so the emerging buds are just below the soil surface. Container grown plants can be planted anytime during the growing season 12 to 18 inches apart. The crown of 'Butterfly Blue' should be planted at the depth it was growing in the container to prevent crown rot. It is recommended the basal foliage not be cut back in the fall. Winter damaged foliage should be removed in the spring.

Scabiosa columbaria 'Butterfly Blue' is an excellent front of the border plant to use in combination with annuals, bulbs and perennials. The

foliage remains clean and unblemished throughout the season. The delicate blue flowers add softness to the garden when massed with bolder colored plants of yellow, bright pink or red. They also work well with cooler tones of white, silver and blue.

Despite its delicate appearance, 'Butterfly Blue' is a sturdy plant. The plants do not require staking. During the summer, butterflies find the nectar rich flowers. 'Butterfly Blue' may be combined with *Coreopsis verticillata* 'Moonbeam,' *Dianthus* 'Bath's Pink,' and *Pennisetum alopecuroides* for a three season, carefree garden. The outstanding qualities of *Scabiosa columbaria* 'Butterfly Blue' are sure to place this underused perennial in the top group of favorite long blooming perennials. (MJM)



Mulches

Mulches in the home landscape not only conserve moisture, modify soil temperatures and control weeds, but also may be used to make landscapes more attractive and usable. Many types of material, organic or inorganic, may be used as mulch.

Organic mulches may break down in one season or less or persist for several seasons. Those that persist for more than

one growing season, are more useful around permanent plants. Inorganic mulches such as gravel, crushed stone or some manufactured products are not as beneficial to plants as the organic mulches, such as wood chips, sawdust, bark, compost, grass clippings or shredded leaves.

Though not generally considered mulches, some low growing ground cover plants

produce many of the same beneficial effects as mulch. Mulches should not be considered as fertilizer. Most of them release some nutrients as they decompose, but the fertilizer value is very small compared to the physical effects. Where mulches are needed, use them for the mulch value and add fertilizer as needed. (MJM)

2000 February/March Garden Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 Check house plants for insects	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9 Do a germination test on saved seeds	10	11	12
13	14 Air layer leggy house plants, like rubber plant	15	16 Cut flowering shrub branches for forcing	17 Check bird feeders	18 Order seeds	19
20	21	22	23 Start perennial flower seeds indoors	24	25 Prune fruit trees	26
27	28	29	1 Put up bird houses	2 Prune grape vines	3	4
5	6 Start a garden journal	7 Prune deciduous trees	8 Prune deciduous, non-spring flowering shrubs	9	10 Make a garden plan	11
12	13	14	15 Service lawn mower & garden equipment	16	17	18
19	20 Start seeds indoors for transplants	21	22	23 Watch for spring bulb growth	24	25
26	27	28 Inventory garden tools and supplies	29 Turn compost pile	30	31	

Many of us need reminders. That is the purpose of this calendar. Check the calendar each month and follow the recommendations if they are necessary in your landscape situation. (MJM)

Horticulture information center

NUFACTS
24 hours a day, 7 days a week
1-800-832-5441; or
441-7188 in the Lincoln area



To listen to a NUFACTS information center message, call the number above on a touch-tone phone, then enter a three-digit number listed below. Call 441-7180 to receive a brochure with all the NUFACTS message topics. (MJM)

- 117 Tree Snow Damage
- 124 Wood for Fireplace
- 137 De-icing Salt Injury
- 139 Rabbit Damage to Plants
- 210 Amaryllis
- 213 Prayer Plant
- 214 Houseplant Insects
- 215 Cyclamens
- 217 Boston Fern
- 218 African Violet Care
- 222 Winter Houseplant Care
- 223 Repotting Houseplants
- 224 Houseplant Artificial Light