

Thai Basil

Ocimum basilicum 'Siam Queen'



Height:	up to 30cm
Suitable for:	A warm, sunny sheltered spot. Ideal to grow in containers in the greenhouse.
Summary:	This is a large leaf basil cultivar with pale green foliage and a strong liquorice flavour and fragrance, which is extensively used in Far Eastern cuisine. When it flowers it has large, really striking burgundy coloured flower heads, making it an especially attractive specimen if grown in a container.

More information:

Thai basil, or Asian basil as it is sometimes known, is a type of sweet basil specially selected for its flavour and for the fact that this flavour is stable at the high temperatures used in Thai cooking.

In Thailand it is known as *bai horapha*.

There are in fact 3 types of basil used in Thai cuisine.

'Siam Queen' is the cultivar most commonly used in Thai cooking in the West of the globe. In addition there is Holy basil or *tulasi* - most popular in Thailand itself, and Thai lemon basil or *bai maeng-lak*.

Once established in a warm sunny spot, this is a fast growing basil with long narrow leaves and large, deep red flowerheads which make it a very attractive, as well as useful, herb to grow.

Like all basil it likes a warm well drained and sunny spot. It grows best in a container and ideally should not be kept outside until night time temperatures can be guaranteed to stay above 10°C. It is also best to water it in the morning as damp foliage and a chilly night are a recipe for disaster!

In general Thai basil can be used in Indian and Italian cookery as well as traditional Thai. Use it fresh in salads and to flavour soup, pasta and garnish vegetables. Its flavour combines especially well with seafood, rice and poultry.

In Thai cooking large handfuls of the herb are added to stir fry dishes. The leaves are also often used as a condiment, a bowl of leaves on the table with soup or noodle dishes enables the diners to season their own food to taste.

If you have a glut of leaves then the basil leaves combined with some coriander make a fine oriental style pesto.

- Chop a tablespoon of almonds or unsalted peanuts roughly in the food processor.
- Add 2 double handfuls of Thai basil and about half of this quantity of coriander. A chilli can be added at this stage if you would like some heat to the pesto.
- Sprinkle in 1 tsp each of soy sauce and fish sauce, 1 tablespoon of lime juice and 3 tablespoons of vegetable oil.
- Process until smooth but still with discernible pieces of leaf in the purée.

The quantities of the ingredients are variable, taste the pesto and add more of the seasonings if required. A few sprigs of mint can also be added to the herb mix.