

# Basil

Basil, or *Ocimum Basilicum*, literally meaning to “feel Royal” originates from Africa and Asia and was thought to have been another one of the herbs that Alexander the great brought to Greece in about 350 BC. Its journey to the UK can be dated back to around 1500 where it traveled from India.

It has somewhat of a fiery reputation, being classically associated with the red planet Mars, and the ancient Greeks and Romans thought basil would only grow if you screamed wild curses and shouted intelligibly while sowing the seeds. They also believed if you left a basil leaf under a pot, it would turn into a scorpion. There is even a famous folk tale that tells of a man who upon smelling the leaves had a scorpion grow inside his brain!

Such stories poetically reflect the potent nature of this culinary herb which has been used as a medicine for time immorial. One of the many uses is to boost the body's own defensive fire and can be used in teas along with ginger and honey to ward off winter colds and flus. If the cold has already progressed and is characterized by chills and aches it can be combined with black pepper, and in times gone by, when fever and weakness set in basil would be drunk with mint at regular intervals.

In addition to its stimulating effect upon the immune system, Basil is also a strong intestinal stimulant and can be used to relieve a broad range of digestive disorders due to its ability to increase both bile and stomach acid production. Basil, like ginger, may even also be of use in inflammatory conditions like gastric ulcers. This may be explained by the Ayurvedic understanding of what they call ‘Holy Basil’. Tulsi, as it is known in Sanskrit, is considered to be an adaptogen, meaning it balances a range of different processes in the body, and is also helpful for adapting to stress. Marked by its strong pungent sweet aroma, Tulsi is also regarded as an "elixir of life" and believed to promote longevity.

The final area that basil has been used is as a ‘cephalic’ to clear the head, not only will the steamed fresh leaves relieve a head cold with sinusitis, but this strong aromatic herb has also been traditionally used to chase away ‘brain fag’ or mental fuzziness and a depressed spirit.

Of course, such medicinal qualities can only be guaranteed by fresh, quality organic herbs, so insist on the best!

- The Barefoot Doctor