Holy Basil

Ocimum tenuiflorum



Holy Basil flowers
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 3 feet

Spread: 24 inches

Spacing: 18 inches

Sunlight: ○

Hardiness Zone: 10a

Other Names: syn. Ocimum sanctum, Tulasi, Thulasi

Description:

An aromatic, short lived perennial that is grown as a medicinal in eastern cultures; produces small purplish pink and white flowers in summer; pinch flower stems to promote leaf growth; great for mixed containers, herb gardens

Edible Qualities

Holy Basil is a perennial herb that is commonly grown for its edible qualities, although it does have ornamental merits as well. The fragrant oval green leaves are usually harvested from early summer to early fall. The leaves have a pleasant taste and a distinctive fragrance.

The leaves are most often used in the following ways:

- Fresh Eating
- Cooking
- Seasoning

Features & Attributes

Holy Basil's attractive fragrant oval leaves remain green in color throughout the season on a plant with an upright spreading habit of growth. It has masses of beautiful spikes of lilac purple flowers with white overtones rising above the foliage in mid summer, which are most effective when planted in groupings.

This is an herbaceous perennial herb with an upright spreading habit of growth. Its medium texture blends into the garden, but can always be balanced by a couple of finer or coarser plants for an effective composition. This is a high maintenance plant that will require regular care and upkeep. Trim off the flower heads after they fade and die to encourage more blooms late into the season. It is a good choice for attracting bees, butterflies and hummingbirds to your yard, but is not particularly attractive to deer who tend to leave it alone in favor of tastier treats. It has no significant negative characteristics.

Aside from its primary use as an edible, Holy Basil is sutiable for the following landscape applications;

- Mass Planting
- General Garden Use
- Herb Gardens
- Container Planting

Planting & Growing

Holy Basil will grow to be about 3 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 24 inches. When grown in masses or used as a bedding plant, individual plants should be spaced approximately 18 inches apart. It grows at a fast rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for approximately 3 years. As an herbaceous perennial, this plant will usually die back to the crown each winter, and will regrow from the base each spring. Be careful not to disturb the crown in late winter when it may not be readily seen!

This plant can be integrated into a landscape or flower garden by creative gardeners, but is usually grown in a designated herb garden. It should only be grown in full sunlight. It prefers to grow in average to moist conditions, and shouldn't be allowed to dry out. It may require supplemental watering during periods of drought or extended heat. It is not particular as to soil type or pH. It is somewhat tolerant of urban pollution. This species is not originally from North America.

Holy Basil is a good choice for the edible garden, but it is also well-suited for use in outdoor pots and containers. With its upright habit of growth, it is best suited for use as a 'thriller' in the 'spiller-thriller-filler' container combination; plant it near the center of the pot, surrounded by smaller plants and those that spill over the edges. It is even sizeable enough that it can be grown alone in a suitable container. Note that when growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.