

»»» NEWSLETTER «««

CCHD GARDEN NEWS

Gardening Education 101



TOP NEWS OF THE MONTH

THE TOMATO; AUGUST PLANT SPOTLIGHT

By: Marti Keith

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When it came time for the garden team to decide what they wanted the plant of the month to be, of course we all chose the tomato. August is the month when tomatoes are in full production and in abundance in the garden. Marti Keith is going to share a little information on the tomato along with one of her favorite recipes on how to use them.
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Because the plant of the month is tomatoes, it only makes sense for the herb of the month to be Basil! Let's be honest, is there a greater culinary duo than tomatoes and Basil? Our writer, Jo Polk, is going to give us all the dirt on this herb wonder, Basil.
Please continuing reading on page 2.

HERB OF THE MONTH

By: Jo Polk

THE GEN Z GARDENER; MY MENTAL HEALTH JOURNEY

By: Hannah Dickens

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Hannah talks about her experience with gardening during one of the worst times for her mental health. Hannah opens up about her mental health and how gardening helps her cope. Continued on page 3.

THE TOMATO;

AUGUST PLANT SPOTLIGHT

By: Marti Keith

Did you know that tomatoes originated from the Andes and Mexico where they were cultivated since 700AD? Once they made it to Europe they were viewed by some as poisonous and were not popular in North America until the 19th century.

Tomatoes are a powerhouse when it comes to nutrition. They are rich in vitamins A, C and K as well as potassium, folate and lycopene. There are several kinds of tomatoes, in fact, there are 10,000 known varieties of tomatoes worldwide. Heirloom tomatoes are passed down through generations and some examples are, Amish Paste, Brandywine and Cherokee Purple. Hybrid tomatoes are intentionally bred by cross pollinating two different tomato varieties to combine desirable traits. Hybrids are considered more disease and pest resistant. Both Hybrid and heirloom Tomatoes can be grown from both seed or an established plant from any garden center.

Tomatoes are also either determinate or indeterminate. Determinant tomatoes produce fruit faster in general and grow to a specific size. They also stop growing and produce fruit all at once. Indeterminate tomatoes can produce fruit all season and offer a continuous supply throughout the growing season and tend to grow tall and full. My personal favorite of all the tomatoes is the Beefsteak, an indeterminate tomato which can be a hybrid or a heirloom tomato and is amazing with cottage cheese or used on a BLT. Yum!

Tomatoes are a perfect beginner gardening crop because they are very resilient and you can grow them in a variety places. They do well in raised beds, directly in the ground, in containers like grow bags or buckets, hanging bags or my favorite technique in straw; (more to follow about straw gardening in the future). Tomatoes require lots of sun, at least 6 hours so make sure whatever you put them in has a good source of sunlight. Watering them regularly is a must but try to avoid wetting the leaves, tomatoes don't like having their leaves soak and it can cause mildew on the leaves. Watering at the base of the plant is the best way to get water to them and pruning those leaves close to the ground helps reduce mildew and soil borne pests.

Supporting your plants with tomato cages or stakes allow fruit to ripen well. You should prune sucker growth to allow for bigger growth of fruit (a sucker is a small shoot that grows in the "crotch" or "axil" formed by the main stem and a leaf branch or simply put, a leaf between the branches.) Pruning also allows for good air flow to the leaves and branches of the plant reducing the risk of powdery mildew and better visual pest identification. You need to fertilize you tomatoes regularly by using a good fertilizer that is low in nitrogen and high in phosphorus and potassium, especially when the plant starts to flower. A balanced fertilizer, like 10-10-10, is a good all-purpose choice, particularly if your soil is lacking in nitrogen. I like to plant marigolds and basil around base to help with bug control.

We hope we have convinced you to try growing this resilient and tasty crop in your garden and please email us and let us know your favorite tomato variety!



THE RECIPE; TOMATO APPETIZER

Ingredients:

1 pie crust (store bought was used in this recipe), 1 package Boursin garlic and herb soft cheese spread, 1T Olive Oil, salt and pepper to taste, basil leaves, as much or as little as you prefer and 3 medium size tomatoes

Process:

Preheat your oven to 400 degrees (F) and begin to prep your tomatoes by boiling water and placing the tomatoes in the water for about 30 seconds, remove the tomatoes from the boiling water and put them into ice water and this will cause the skin to peel off of the tomato. Then you can slice the peeled tomatoes into quarter inch slices. Place the sliced tomatoes on a few layers of paper towels and sprinkle with salt and allow them to set for around 30 minutes to draw out moisture. Then lay out your refrigerated pie crust on parchment paper or a baking sheet and spread the Boursin cheese on the crust leaving an inch around the edges, spread your tomatoes on top of the cheese overlapping them as necessary and drizzle with the olive oil and more salt and pepper if desired. Fold the crust edges over the cheese and tomatoes and bake in the oven for 25 to 30 minutes until the crust is golden brown. Sprinkle with sliced basil and enjoy warm or cold!



BASIL; HERB OF THE MONTH

By: Jo Polk



Basil is scientifically known as *Ocimum basilicum* and has a rich culinary and medicinal history. This month, Basil is our herb spotlight of the month and I'm excited to share this incredible herb with you.

Basil originated in India and was considered sacred and revered and associated with many religious rituals. Basil spread from India to other parts of the world. The ancient Egyptians used basil for embalming rituals and it was highly valued for the aromatic properties. From there, it found the way to ancient Greece and Rome and became a symbol of love, protection and hospitality.

With its strong fragrance and flavor, basil's culinary use became more profound and took on prominent roles in many cuisines like Mediterranean and Southeast Asian cooking. Its flavor is very distinct and has been described as sweet and peppery with hints of clove and anise. Once you have tasted it, you will quickly be able to pick it out in dishes.

Basil makes a great beginner gardener herb because it is easy to cultivate if you follow the right steps. Many people buy the little pots of herbs at the grocery store and within weeks, their basil dies. Follow these tips to ensure you have a bounty of basil that will last you through the entire growing season. Basil is an annual herb which means it only lasts one growing season and if it is planted outside, the first frost will kill it, however, you can collect the leaves and dry them for continues cooking uses.

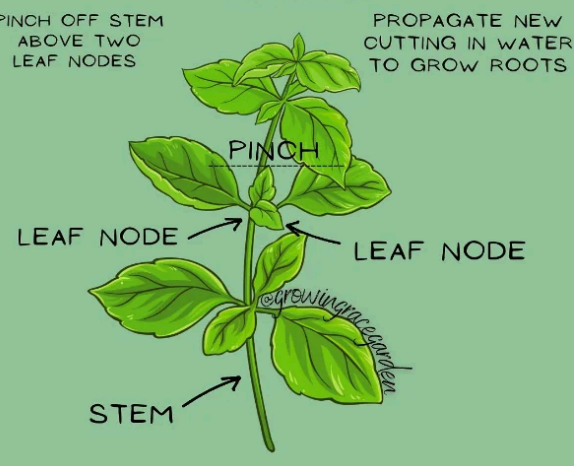
Basil thrives in warm climates and does very well with the heat. Don't over water the basil, I wait until it start to see the leaves become droopy and will water it then. Basil can grow from seeds or cutting and once you have an establish plant, prune it regularly. When you prune your basil, it will become more like a bush instead of becoming long and leggy. (See the diagram to the left for proper pruning directions.) You can put the pinched off parts in water and will begin to see roots develop within days and if you plant it, you will have an entirely new basil plant and free basil tastes delicious! If you want your basil to continue producing the leave, pinch the flowers off the top when they begin to form to avoid the plant from completing the life cycle. I grow basil just to flower because the flowers are very pretty and attract pollinators to my garden.

Basil makes a wonderful companion plant to the tomato. Planting basil near tomatoes helps detour pests like aphids, whiteflies and the dreaded tomato hornworm. Basil is also thought to improve the health and flavor of the tomatoes. If you allow the basil to flower, the flowers attract pollinators and this helps your tomatoes produce more fruit. If you don't enjoy the flavor of basil, try growing it and allow it to go to flower. It makes a beautiful ornamental to the garden, smells wonderful and attracts the pollinators to your other plants.

Some simple and delicious culinary uses for fresh basil include slicing it in thin strips to sprinkle on top of pizza or flat breads, add it to spaghetti sauce toward the end of cooking to add a vibrant and fresh spark to the sauce, or try experimenting making a pesto sauce and tossing cooked pasta for a quick dinner.

I hope you to try growing this herb in your garden and if you would like to share your favorite basil recipe, please send an email to jpolk@clarkcounty.in.gov and put "Garden News" in the subject line.

HOW TO PRUNE BASIL





THE GEN Z GARDENER

By: Hannah Dickens

I've struggled with my mental health every since I can remember. I was officially diagnosed at the age of seven with attention deficit disorder, later at the age of 19 I received my Autism Spectrum disorder diagnosis and at 20, I received my bi-polar disorder diagnosis. I hate the term "disorder" because I am not a disorder, my brain processes information differently than most people and I feel things on a different level than most people. Because of this, "normal" events like break ups affect me at a different level than many people.

Last year, I went through a very bad breakup and my mental health was at an all-time-low. My mental health was worse than ever and I didn't know what to do with myself. I would have panic attacks because I had completely lost my identity and didn't even know what I enjoyed anymore. My mother spent many days in the garden and I began to go out to the garden and just started picking the vegetables everyday and found myself spending more and more time out there. Sometimes by myself and sometimes just being there with my mother so I felt comfort. She would tell me about the different plants and how they worked together to thrive. We would watch the different butterflies and bees and occasionally a wasp or hornet would show up. She wouldn't let me swat at them explaining they all had a purpose and were all important to the garden.

As time went on and each day passed, I would go out to the garden daily to just focus on the plants, the bugs and the soil. I began to think about how the soil felt warm in my hands, I would pick it up and squeeze it and run my fingers through it. I would listen to the bees buzzing around the flowers and could hear the birds chirping. I smelled the garden fragrance and would inhale deeply and slowly. It was a mixture of dirt, rain, flowers, herbs and compost.

I did not realize it at the time it was happening but I was grounding myself. I was controlling my anxiety and panic attacks by allowing my senses to soothe me. The sight, the smell, the sound and the taste of the occasional vegetables I would snack on was a grounding technique. I did not care what it was called at the time, I just knew that I felt better leaving the garden than I did when I went into the garden. Yes, I still had pain and sorrow but I was feeling less lost and gradually, less hopeless. Seeing how life sprang from tiny seeds and helped sustain life of the smallest insect to my own body brought a joy to my soul.



I found a peace in the garden and my mind became calm. It helped to keep my mind off of the breakup and made me think about what I wanted in my next relationship. I decided I needed to stay single until I was able to figure out what I wanted. I knew I didn't want to lose my identity again and I didn't want to be treated like an "option" anymore. That was a year ago and I'm still single because I am not going to settle for anything less. I don't spend as much time in the garden right now because of school and enjoying my life with my friends but I know it is there when I need it. Occasionally I join my mom out there picking vegetables and walking through to admire the beauty of the flowers. I listen to the bees and just take a breath of the garden smell. It is there for me and that makes me happy.

QUESTIONS?

SEND US YOUR GARDENING QUESTIONS

Do you have questions you would like us to answer? Each newsletter will have a section for readers to submit questions and let us try to answer those for you. Please submit our questions via email to: jpolk@clarkcounty.in.gov with Gardening 101 question in the subject line.