

Botanic name : *Ocimum basilicum* L. -- Sp. Pl. 2: 597. 1753 [1 May 1753] (IK)

Common name : Sweet Basil, Great Basil, Royal herb, Berbery (Sanskrit)

Family : Lamiaceae (Labiatae)-the mint family

Habitat : Terrestrial; meadows and fields

Distribution : Native to India, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, SE Asia, Malay; introduced in Mid-Africa, parts of tropical America, Caucasus, UK. Due to extensive grazing, habitat destruction, pollution, and commercial exploitation are some of the threats the plant is facing

Description : A stout, bushy, aromatic, perennial herb; leaves opposite, stem 4-angled; white irregular-shaped flowers arranged in loose racemes (verticillaster), bilabiate corolla, epipetalous with didynamous stamens (2+2), style gynobasic; fruit cerise showing dry indehiscent nature

Phytochemicals: A popular culinary herb containing terpenoids (mono-, di-, tri-, sesqui terpenoids), alkaloids, flavonoids, tannins, saponin glycosides and ascorbic acid, essential oil [(linalool (21.1–33.8% of total quantified volatile compounds), estragole (35.9–56.2%), eugenol (1.12– 4.36%), and 1,8-cineole (3.40–4.37%)], volatile oil (eugenol, thymol, carvacrol and 4-allylphenol), and is an excellent source of Ca, Mg, Fe, Cu, K, Mn, Vitamin A, beta-carotene, beta-caryophyllene, etc.

Medicinal/Economic uses : Antibacterial, anti-aging, antidepressant, immunomodulatory, anti-parasite, antispasmodic, aromatic, cardioprotective, carminative, digestive, hepatoprotective, stomachic, tonic, favoring agent, galactagogue, principally acting on the digestive and nervous systems, inflammatory bowel diseases and arthritis (beta-caryophyllene), stomach cramps, easing flatulence colic and indigestion. Watery extracts of leaves were taken internally in the treatment of feverish illnesses (especially colds and influenza), nausea, gastro-enteritis, migraine, insomnia, depression and exhaustion. Externally, they are used to treat acne, loss of smell, insect stings, snake bites and skin infections. Seed infusion is used in treating dysentery, chronic diarrhea, and gonorrhoea as well as to remove film and opacity from the eyes. In Ayurveda, basil is useful in rheumatoid arthritis, anorexia, itching, menstrual disorders, and malaria. The essential oil extracted from the whole plant is used in perfumery, aromatherapy, mosquito and insect repellent. Plant contains estragole a potentially carcinogenic and mutagenic essential oil. Harmful during pregnancy and to small infants/children. Regarding edible use, with tomato dishes, pasta sauces, beans, peppers and aubergines, basil leaves (Fresh/dried) are used as salads. Leaves are also used to make refreshing tea. Water soaked seeds are prepared into a refreshing beverage called 'sherbet tokhum' in the Mediterranean region