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The Vine Line

See more planting tips and information from Memphis Botanic Garden Horticulture Staff below!

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Something you want to see or learn more about? Email our Horticulture Director rick.pudwell@memphisbotanicgarden.com.

To read past issues of The Vine Line, [click here](#).

Can Food be Medicine? You Decide.



So, with the way the world around us is evolving and reacting to the imminent threat of the Covid-19 virus, and all the problems that are manifesting because of this threat to our health, you might be wondering what is something concrete that you can do.

I, personally am looking at food: what can I grow that will give me the least amount of expenditure with the largest amount of return? One of the foods that comes to mind is basil.

There are many types/flavors of basil: spicy, sweet, Thai (anise-flavored), Genovese (we have a new variety: a late blooming, columnar Genovese type here that at MBG that will be available soon), African Blue (VERY basily flavored), lime, purple, lettuce leaf (very large leaves – great to place on a sandwich instead of lettuce), and then there are the holy basil. Basils, with more than 64 species native to the tropics and subtropics of the Old and New World – especially Africa, are generally nutritious.

Fresh basil supplies us with beta-carotene (an antioxidant which is turned to

vitamin A once we ingest it). Two tablespoons of basil supplies us with 20% of our daily requirements of vitamin K. Basil contains flavonoids and volatile oils such as linalool, eugenol, sabinene, myrcene and limonene, which are antioxidant and anti-inflammatory. Scientists have found that these oils might be antimicrobial against bacteria, yeast, and mold. Iron, calcium, magnesium, manganese, vitamin C, and potassium are also found in basil.

My favorite basil is Holy Basil (aka Tulsi). There are many different holy basil varieties such as Vana, Krishna, Rama, Kapoor, and one that is going by the name of Temperate. The Temperate and the Kapoor varieties grow nicely here in the Mid-South and are my choices for growing. These two holy basil varieties smell and taste fruity with a touch of cooling cloves. Holy basil is listed as an adaptogen (adaptogens reduce stress on the body and its systems—both mentally and physically).

Traditionally, holy basil has been used for reducing stress, enhancing the immune system, promoting longevity, improving metabolic oxygenation, increasing endurance, fighting infections, and improving digestion.

Don't have a lot of money? Buy one basil (any basil!) and propagate it with cuttings. Add fresh basil to canned soups such as tomato to elevate the flavor. Use basil to make pastes, pestos, and chimichurri sauces. Take a handful of leaves and make a "tea," or, more accurately, an infusion, and drink it hot or cold. Crush a few leaves and drop them into your water bottle for a simple aromatic punch of flavor.

Food? Medicine? Food as medicine! Whatever you call it, basil is a frugal, flavorful addition to your menu.

(This is not intended to be medical advice: please consult with your doctor before using basil as a medicine.)

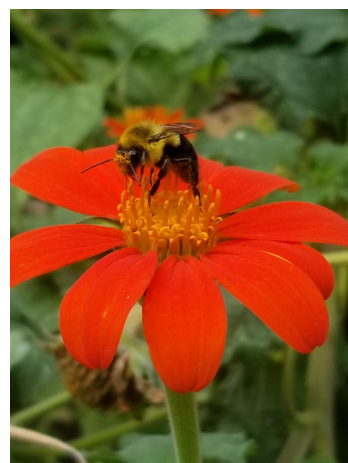
By Sherri McCalla, Herb Garden Curator

Grow Your Own Pollinator-Attracting Flowers at Home from Seed

Bring more butterflies and beneficial pollinators to your yard this season by planting the beautiful Mexican Sunflower, or *Tithonia*.

This amazing annual flower can quickly grow to 5-6' tall, and will bear an unending supply of brilliant orange, 4" wide flowers (a dozen or more at a time!) until frost. This plant is rarely offered for sale at garden centers, but it is easy to grow yourself at home from seed. You may sow the seeds directly in your garden after frost, or get earlier blooms by starting seeds indoors now.

Order the seeds online or purchase them locally, then plant them in 3" or 4" pots of potting soil in a bright south or west window. Water when the soil begins to dry out. Within a week, you should have new seedlings popping up! After two sets of true leaves have appeared, pinch off the main stem just below the newest set of leaves. This will encourage branching for a bushier plant.



After April 15 (our frost-free date), plant your seedlings outside in a sunny spot. Your Mexican sunflowers will grow quickly, and the electric orange flowers



they produce will attract an unbelievable array of butterflies, bees, and even energetic hummingbirds! These plants get big, so tie them to a 4' tall garden stake to help keep them upright.

Planting pollinator-attracting plants will bring beautiful insects into your own backyard for you to observe and enjoy, while feeding our pollinator friends. Insect pollinators keep our fruit and vegetable plants productive!

By Jill Maybry, MBG horticulturist

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