

GARDEN NEWS

PESTO

Mmmm...Basil! As the nights stay reliably warmer, it's time to plant this tender summer herb, one of our favorites for making pesto. But keep in mind that "pesto" refers to a technique (ground in a pestle), not the ingredients, and can be made from many different herbs! Instead of basil, try using cilantro or parsley, or mixing one of these more leafy herbs with a little sage, thyme, tarragon, or oregano. You can use pine nuts, walnuts, or even almonds or peanuts depending on your taste, and blend in the traditional parmesan reggiano or a blend of parmesan and a sweet tangy sheep's cheese like pecorino or manchego. See our [Pesto web page](#) for a basic recipe with a number of variations including combinations of cilantro, thyme, tarragon, sage, and oregano.



Even with all those other tempting recipes, it's impossible to resist the classic basil pesto. Six to ten basil plants will keep most families supplied with enough basil leaves to make pesto here and there throughout the summer. Grow more if you're a big pesto fan or want to freeze any extra. Plant basil where it will receive plenty of sunshine, and keep the soil moist. Pinch off the flower buds as they appear to encourage the plants to make more leaves – although you can let a few buds flower and go to seed if you'd like some to pop up in the garden next season. When your plants have grown big enough to start harvesting leaves, try to resist the biggest (i.e., quickest and easiest) leaves and choose the smaller, more tender ones with more delicate flavor.

For absolutely the best basil pesto with the creamiest texture and most nuanced flavors, stick with the [traditional method](#) and grind the ingredients slowly in a mortar and pestle. For a much quicker version that's still quite delicious, throw everything in a food processor and blend away. Stir into hot drained pasta, toss with mixed sautéed vegetables, layer in a lasagna, drop a spoonful in soup, use as a dip or sandwich spread....add to any dish that needs a little oil and herb flavor.

BEANS

Vegetable gardeners usually grow a few rows of green beans but often neglect to plant dried beans, perhaps because "dried beans" sounds so prosaic - but homegrown heirloom varieties are anything but! A bean is not just a bean – on our list we classify the varieties according to how they grow (bush or pole), and how they're eaten (dry, fresh, snap, or shell).



The familiar garden “green beans” and yellow wax beans are part of the fresh snap bean family, which also includes purple, red, and mottled varieties as well as flat-podded beans. They are eaten while still small and tender and the seeds are immature. ‘Purple Queen’ is a wax bush bean with smooth dark violet pods and excellent taste. Unfortunately they lose their beautiful purple hue and turn green when cooked, but the purple pods do make picking them easier, as they stand out from the green plants!

Dry beans are grown like green beans, except that instead of picking the pods when they are young and tender (with very small soft seeds), they are allowed to fully mature and even dry out on the plants. Then the dried pods are removed and the inner beans saved for cooking later. And while drying beans is a great way to store them for long periods of time, there’s no rule that says you have to wait until they’re dry; most of these varieties are just as delicious eaten as a fresh shell bean, without the loss of nutritional content! Go beyond grocery store black and pinto beans with a row of ‘Peregion,’ an Oregon native in swirled chocolatey brown shades with full nutty flavor, or ‘Yin Yang,’ a smooth mild-flavored bean with a remarkable half white-half black pattern.

Fresh shell beans fall somewhere in between green or snap beans and dry beans. They are more substantial than green beans, but creamier and sweeter than dry beans. Lima beans and favas are two examples that are (somewhat) familiar in the American diet, and cannellini, the famous Italian white kidney bean, is eaten fresh or dried. Harvest these types when the pod has become tough and leathery and the beans inside are bulging against the sides. Remove them from the pods and steam or cook them like other fresh vegetables (no need to presoak). They don’t keep very long once harvested, but extras can be shelled and frozen for later use. Brown and beige ‘Tongue of Fire’ adds full-bodied flavor to soups or stands alone as a tasty side dish, and the nutty tasting burgundy ‘Vermont Cranberry’ is also good for soups or baking.

But don’t take it from us – visit our website library to hear from a pair of Northwest farmers about their favorite [“Magic Beans”](#) (cooking tips and recipes included) and read Ann Lovejoy’s article about [heirloom beans](#).



Edamame, or fresh soy beans, are another often-overlooked delicacy that thrive in the Northwest. This traditional Asian favorite grows just like any bush bean. They may get a little floppy, and you can either let them sprawl a bit or stake them for a neater look. Watch for the pods to become fully plump but still green, then harvest them and cook them in the pods or shelled. The [Edamame brochure](#) on our website contains instructions for how to eat them Japanese bar-food style, straight out of the pod, along with other recipes and a tremendous catalog of nutritional benefits.

Recent issues of GARDEN NEWS may be viewed at www.loghouseplants.com/gardennews.htm