

GARDENING

Basil, centaurea are garden picks of year

GARDEN SPOT



MARTY FIGLEY

The National Garden Bureau has deemed 2001 "The Year of the Basil" and "The Year of the Centaurea," so there's something for the tummy and something for the soul.

Basil is a very popular plant both in the garden and in the kitchen. Its many varieties can add their own flavor and fragrance to many dishes.

The genus name of sweet basil, *Ocimum*, is from a Greek verb that means "to be fragrant." The species name, *basilicum*, comes from the Greek *basileus*, which means the "king of herbs," and it does command respect for its versatility.

The most commonly grown of the 30 different species of basil is *O. basilicum* and its sub-

species, such as holy basil, *O. sanctum*, a sacred herb of India used in religious ceremonies. With its pink flowers, it is often grown as an ornamental.

The culinary basil include the sweet green basil mentioned above, dwarf basil, *O. b. "Minimum"*, also known as bush basil — "Spicy Globe" and "Green Bouquet" are dwarf types.

Purple-leaved basil (*O. b. purpureum*) are very ornamental. "Dark Opal," "Purple Ruffles" and "Red Rubin" are very popular varieties. Their ruffled, frilled or deeply cut leaves are very pungent.

Then there are scented-leaf plants, such as lemon, cinnamon and anise, to name a few.

Sow seeds indoors starting about mid-April, following package directions. The soil needs to warm up to about 55 degrees or more (day and night) before seeds can be sowed outdoors.

If you sow it every three to four weeks, you will be assured of having enough through the summer. Many nurseries also carry the plants.

With the various foliage colors, basil makes a pretty picture in the garden. It likes a sunny spot and will grow well either directly in the ground or in containers. Basil needs about an inch of water a week.

It is highly recommended that the flower stalks be cut off, as they deplete the plant's energy, resulting in fewer leaves. I always say, ABBPOF (Avoid Bitter Basil: Pinch Off Flowers).

Go blue

The flower of the year is centaurea, annuals sometimes called other names (see below). We called them ragged robins in southern Ohio.

The genus name, *Centaurea*, has its basis in Greek mythology. Chiron, one of the centaurs, is said to have used the flower to heal wounds including his own. Peaceful Chiron is credited in myth with teaching mankind about the healing powers of herbs.

Modern herbalists consider a decoction of the leaves useful as an eye lotion.

There are a number of species, but the most readily available are cornflower, *Centaurea cyanus*; bachelor's button, *C. americana*; basket flower; and mountain blue, *C. montana*, also called perennial cornflower.

The flowers have been on Earth many years. Cornflowers did and now grow wild in cornfields in Europe and the United States. Bachelor's button were worn in the buttonhole of a suit or shirt when bachelors went courting. The origin of mountain blue is from France. The ray-like outer petals of basket flowers make the blooms look as if they are set in a shallow basket.

Some are hardy in our zone, others aren't. Look on the seed packet to be sure. It may be necessary to buy seeds, as the taller varieties may not be available at nurseries.

In our zone, sow seed of the annuals outdoors in early spring; perennials in early spring or fall. Keep the seedbed moist until germination occurs.

To have flowers throughout the summer, sow two to three times at two-week intervals.

Another sowing in spring may be necessary if you sowed in the fall. Follow directions on the package for indoor sowing.

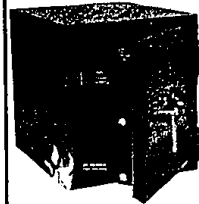
Centaureas look great when planted with red poppies and snapdragons or mixed with daylilies in a border. They work very well in an informal setting.

Pinch the plants when necessary to encourage more branching, bushier growth and more flowers. Fertilize monthly with a balanced fertilizer or use a slow-release product at transplanting time.

The National Garden Bureau supports youth garden grants and matching funds programs, and there are two growing programs for classrooms. The bureau also supports the GWAA Plant-A-Row for the Hungry. Visit it on its Web site www.ngb.org.

Marty Figley is an advanced master gardener based in Birmingham. You can leave her a message by dialing (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then 111, then 3445. Her fax number is (248) 644-1314.

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GARDEN SHOW CALENDAR

Here is a list of upcoming Home and Garden shows:

ANTIQUES MARKET

The fourth annual Michigan's Home and Garden Antiques Market displays antiques and accessories for the home, garden and personal adornment in an antique garden setting.

Selections include jewelry, furniture, garden and architectural pieces, birdhouses and benches, ornamental iron and garden gates, quilts, folk art, vintage clothing, purses and perfumes. Show hours are 2-9 p.m., Friday, March 16; noon-8 p.m., Saturday, March 17; and noon-5 p.m., Sunday, March 18, at the Southfield Civic Center, 26000 Evergreen (located at 10 1/2

Mile Road). Admission is \$6 with ads or listings or \$7. One paid admission is good for all days of the show. Children under 12 admitted free. For information, click on www.antiqnet.com.

GMC BUILDERS

The GMC Builders Home & Garden Show features products for homes and gardens at the Cobo Conference-Exhibition Center in Detroit. Show hours are 2-10 p.m., Thursday and Friday, March 22 and 23; 10 a.m.-10 p.m., Saturday, March 24 and 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Sunday, March 25. Admission is \$7 adults, \$5 seniors, and \$4 for children 6-12. Children under 6 are free. Call (248) 862-1019.

ANN ARBOR

The 2001 Ann Arbor Spring Garden & Flower Show features Elvin MacDonald, "The Garden Guru," who is the senior editor at Traditional Home Magazine and other garden experts.

Show hours are 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Friday and Saturday, March 30 and 31, and 10 a.m.-4 p.m., April 1, at the Washtenaw Farm Council Grounds, 5055 Ann Arbor-Saline Road, Ann Arbor. Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors, and \$5 for children 5-12. For information, contact the Ann Arbor Spring Garden & Flower Show at (734) 434-8004 or e-mail AAFlowershow@aol.com.



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Jeffrey Moss is vice-president of Advance Plumbing Supply Co. in Walled Lake and Detroit. Call (800) 560-7474 toll-free. Have a plumbing question? Write to Jeffrey at Advance Plumbing Supply Co., 1977 E.W. Maple Rd., Walled Lake, MI 48390.

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