How to grow Basil!

Ocimum basilicum 'Amethyst Improved'

It's time to plant the basil seeds that you are growing for Preview of Spring, March 1–3, 2018. If you want to experiment, you can start some seeds now and some seeds in a week or two. I stapled the Johnny's Seeds instructions onto the envelope I gave you, which of course are a good guide. Here is what I plan to do:

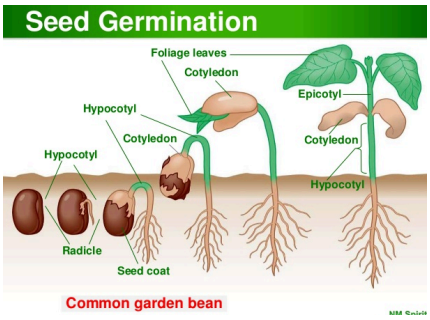
1. Fill a shallow plastic pot with potting mix. I'm using a seed starting mix, such as Espoma organic Seed Starter (on amazon) because it is light, fluffy and easy for little seeds to grow in. For pots, you can use yogurt containers, paper cups, even egg cartons or just plastic pots. Don't use terra cotta pots yet!

2. Spread the seeds on top (they are very tiny) and cover with a light layer of the potting mix.

3. Water with a spray bottle. You need to do this EVERY day; don't let these seeds go dry.

4. Place under grow lights or in a sunny window. Basil needs full sun, a minimum of six hours.

5. They will start to germinate in about a week. Let them grow for 3-4 weeks until they have two sets of real basil leaves. (Those first two leaves that grow are actually *cotyledons*, which are the embryonic first leaves of a seedling. You can see them in the photo on the right below: the leaves that don't really look like basil leaves!) You want to transplant when you have two sets of foliage leaves and one set of cotyledons.



6. When it is time to transplant, fill a pot with potting soil, tapping the pot hard on your counter to settle the soil. Use a pencil to make a hole in the center of the pot for the seedling. Carefully tease out one of the seedlings and place it in the hole, making sure it is straight. Firm up the soil around it and water gently (avoid getting the leaves wet.) You'll need to water it every day.

7. You will have a ton of seedlings. You can pot up 5, 10, 20, however many you want! Give them away as Christmas presents! You can put them in 3-4" plastic pots for now and transplant your best two or three into 6" terra cotta pots later, or you can transplant immediately into 6" terra cotta pots. Before transplanting any plant into a terra cotta pot, be sure to soak the pot thoroughly in water (cover completely with water) until bubbles stop popping up. If you pot up a plant into a dry terra cotta pot, the water will be sucked up by the pot, not the plant.

Other important things:

- To enter this challenge class for Preview of Spring, there must be only ONE plant in a clean 6" terra cotta pot with a saucer.
- All Horticulture entries (including these) are to be brought to Christ Church and passed on Wednesday, February 28 (the day before the show) from 1:00–4:00pm. Please put this on your calendar!
- Leave yourself time on Wednesday morning to groom your basil plant. You want your pot to be very clean, your leaves free of dust, smudges or insects (yikes), and you want to have a pretty top dressing. I often use worm casting for a top dressing or a very black potting soil. What you don't ever want to see are any of those little white balls (perlite).
- Don't be concerned if your leaves aren't green—they are supposed to be purple!!!

If you have any questions at all, please email Trina! trinavhorine@gmail.com