

PRESERVING BASIL

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You can dry or freeze basil for future use, but freezing maintains the freshest taste. Before you preserve the basil, wash it in cold water and dry. (You can use a salad spinner to help dry the basil quicker.)

To freeze the basil, pull the leaves from the stems. If you want to freeze whole leaves, first blanch the leaves for two seconds in boiling water, then drain and rinse immediately with cold water. Pat leaves dry and store in a large, freezer-safe container, separating each layer with plastic wrap. Use in cooking as you would fresh basil leaves, but cup for cup, frozen leaves are more compact than fresh ones, so use a little less than the recipe calls for.

Another way to freeze basil is in oil. After first washing in cold water and drying, place the basil in a food processor, with knife blade attached, puree 2 cups of packed leaves with 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Line a cookie sheet with waxed paper. Drop the mixture by the teaspoonfuls onto the waxed paper and freeze for one hour or until firm. Transfer the dollops (you should have about 16) to a self-sealing, freezer-safe plastic bag and store for up to two months. (Member Debra Cardillo does the basil and oil, but she freezes it in ice cube trays – much easier!) To use in a recipe, stir in a frozen dollop when you're almost finished cooking the soup, chicken or beef stew, or spaghetti sauce.