

Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*, *O. tenuiflorum*)

(Herbal Monograph by Deborah Savarese, October 2018)



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Phylum: Angiosperm
Species/Botanical Name: *Ocimum sanctum*
4 currently known varieties: Kapoor, Vana, Rama, Krishna
(see below, top left, going clockwise)

Class: Eudicot



©Juliet Blankespoor [1]

Family: Lamiaceae / Mint
Other Common Names: Tulsi, Tulasi, Tulasii Patra, Sacred Basil, Indian Holy Basil, Shri Tulasi, Tulasa, Thai Holy Basil, Kra Pao

Genus: *Ocimum* - over 60 different species [2]



©Juliet Blankespoor [1]

Holy Basil is an herb that has been around for centuries, most specifically in India and surrounding countries, although gaining popularity on many fronts around the world. Holy Basil, or also referred to as Tulsi, has been used in Ayurveda medicine since ancient times, for treatment of many common ailments, from respiratory issues and headaches, to inflammation and related issues. [3] Traditional forms of use include fresh, dried, or in ghee, [3] but alcohol-based tinctures, gel caps, and the essential oil have made their way into modern mainstream as well. In India, Tulsi is used daily for many various needs, in addition to specifically the essential oil being used in skin and hair preparations. [3] From a culinary standpoint, Holy Basil has also had its place in the kitchen, in many Southeast Asia countries, and is used in everything from meat dishes, to vegetable dishes, to condiments, beverages, and desserts. [3]



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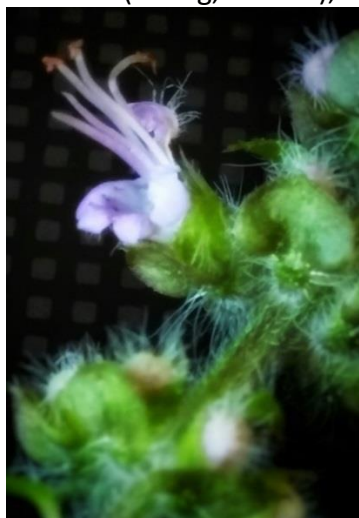
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Identification characteristics:

Typical Mint Family characteristics of 5 united petals (2 lobes up, 3 lobes down), 5 united sepals, 4 stamens (2 long, 2 short),



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with opposite leaves,



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& with hairy square stems.



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Potential look alike and differences between them:

Many plants in the *Ocimum* species can be confused with each other, especially *O. sanctum*, as there are so many varieties. For example, the Krishna variety looks similar to Dark Opal Basil, which is a cultivar of *O. basilicum*, 'Purpurascens'.

The Rama variety looks very similar to Cinnamon Basil, also *O. basilicum*, 'Cinnamon', which is sometimes called Thai Basil. Holy Basil is also often called Thai Basil! Often times, the best way to confirm is by the subtleties in the taste of each one!

Geographical distribution, Native region, Global use

Originally native to Asia. Specifically India, & including Thailand, Nepal, & Malaysia. [4] Has been introduced in Africa, South & Central America, the Caribbean, & Oceania [4]

It has been introduced in North America as well, even though the USDA Plant Database does not indicate it, as I have collected it myself in North Texas on the property of several friends in the area.

Holy Basil is used around the world for many ailments, and could be considered a tonic herb in the way of daily use for overall health and wellness.

Habitat, How to Grow, Duration, & Harvesting guidelines

An invasive, seed-propagated herbaceous shrub that loves sun, Holy Basil "is now widely cultivated and naturalized in places around the world". [4] Tulsi is an "Annual or short-lived Perennial" [4], depending on conditions.

"*O. tenuiflorum* grows in tropical and subtropical regions and is now primarily cultivated in agricultural settings and home gardens, as well as around temples and places of worship". [4]

As with many plants in the Lamiaceae family, Holy Basil is propagated easily and can become invasive quickly! Once plant is well-established, leaves can be collected weekly without issue.



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Tulsi is considered sacred “in the ancient Indian literature and is an important symbol of the Hindu religious tradition”. [1] Also, it “has an important role in various traditional ceremonies”. [3] “Elixir of Life”, “The Incomparable One”, and “Queen of Herbs” are just some of the names given to this sacred healing plant. It has been used for many thousands of years in Ayurvedic medicine, as well as in Hindu spiritual practices.



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When Amma, The Hugging Saint from India, holds events worldwide to give her motherly embrace, “Darshan”, (the actual practice of giving awesome hugs!), she has a traveling bookstore which contains all things Tulsi! Not only such items as seeds, plants, & beads from its wood, but many herbal creations as well, including oils and balms, tincture, and flower essence. There are even images of her praying and blessing over Tulsi! As Holy Basil is considered the most important herb in India, it is commonly found in most Indian households.



[8]

Plant Parts Used

Leaves, flowers, & stems [5]
Seeds [3] & roots [6] are currently being studied as well.



[13]

Constituents & Nutrients

Tannins, glycosides, phenols, saponins, terpenes, alcohols, esters, ethers, flavonoids, alkaloids, volatile oil [8]
Vitamins A, C
Calcium, Iron, Magnesium, potassium, selenium, sodium, zinc [8]
Fats, carbohydrates, proteins [8]

Taste:

Aromatic/pungent, Spicy, peppery, with a hint of mint
😊

Herbal Energetics, Actions (Plant Properties)

Warming, Drying

“Adaptogen, Aromatic Digestive, Relaxing Nervine, Expectorant, Neuroprotective, Antioxidant, Immunomodulating” [2]
“Radio-protective” [7], “Anti-inflammatory, Analgesic & Antipyretic” [6] “Anti-asthmatic, Antiemetic, Diaphoretic, Antidiabetic, Hepato-protective, Hypotensive, Hypo-lipidemic, Antibacterial, Antifungal, Cardio-protective, and Anti-stress agents’ effects”. [3]
“Anti-cancer, anti-depressant, antioxidant, anti-parasitic, anti-protozoal, anti-thyroidism, anti-tussive, anti-ulcer, anti-viral, chemoprotective, nutritive [8]

Plant Preparation Methods

Tea (from fresh or dried), juice, tincture, poultice, powder, infusion in ghee or honey [3], paste, & flower essence [8]

Tincture from dried herb would be the following proportions:

1 gr herb : 3 ml alcohol 40%

Shown right is my adaptation of Rosalee De La Foret’s Cold Brew Tulsi tea [9]

25 gr chopped fresh Tulsi
2 gr hibiscus, c/s
2 gr elderberries, c/s
2 gr marshmallow root, c/s

Steep overnight in the frig, in 1 qt mason jar. Strain and enjoy within 36 hours!



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Dosing strategies & Recipes

Tea from Holy basil can be made with amounts anywhere from 2-112 grams of infused dried herb daily. [2]

Herb Pharm makes a 1:3 tincture from dry herb that can be used by the dropperful 2-4x /day . [10]

Shown right: Dried Tulsi:
Vana, Rama, Krishna
(top left, going clockwise)



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Plant Uses/Indications

“Although Tulasi addresses a variety of chronic & acute illnesses, it can also be taken as a preventative herb to boost immunity & assist the body’s natural process of maintaining health”. [8]

Specific indications include, but not limited to, are “stress, anxiety, high blood pressure, viral infections, fungal infections, depression, colds & flu, herpes virus, radiation exposure, high blood sugar, allergic rhinitis, ulcers, pain” [2]

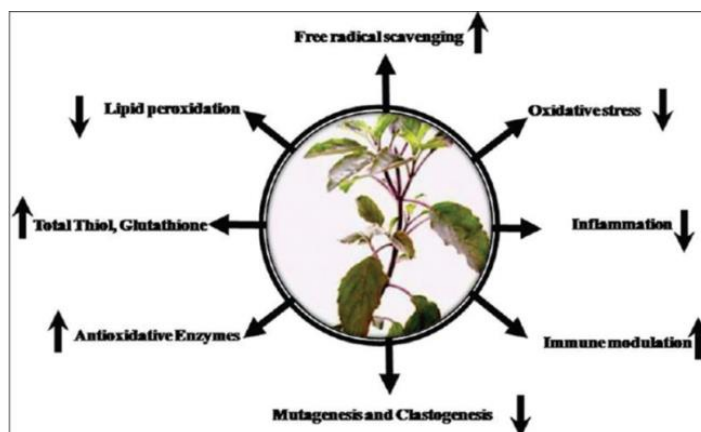
Contraindications

Although considered GRAS, there are certain situations where Holy Basil would be best to consult with qualified healthcare practitioner or avoided altogether.

These include individuals wanting to conceive or who are pregnant or breastfeeding (due to estragole content). [11]
Holy Basil can also be slightly blood thinning, so caution is advised to individuals on blood thinners. [2]

Holy Basil has been shown to be anti-diabetic , so individuals on insulin will need to make adjustments as well when using this herb. [12]

With a wide range of actions, Holy Basil has great potential for allopathic applications as well as its traditional herbal medicine, culinary, and religious uses. As worldwide use grows, the hope is it will continue to be sustainable and unadulterated.



[3]



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Tulsi Blessings to Everyone!



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*Tulasī Pranamma Mantra
Vrindayai Tulasī-devyai
Priyayai keshavasya cha
Vishnu-bhakti-prade devi
Satya-vatyai namo namaḥ*

*I offer my prayers to Tulasī Devi
Who is very dear to Lord Krishna
Oh Goddess, you bestow devotion
And possess the highest truth
[8]*

Sources:

[1] Image used with permission from Chestnut School of Herbal Medicine

[2] Forêt, R. D. (2017). *Alchemy of herbs: Transform everyday ingredients into foods & remedies that heal*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House.

[3] Baliga MS, Rao S, Rai MP, D'souza P. Radio protective effects of the Ayurvedic medicinal plant *Ocimum sanctum* Linn. (Holy Basil): A memoir. *J Can Res Ther* 2016;12:20-7

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[4] Datiles, M. J., & Acevedo-Rodríguez, P. (2018, July 15). *Ocimum tenuiflorum* (holy basil). Retrieved September 20, 2018, from <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/110287>

[5] Keim, Joni, and Deborah Savarese. "Ocimum sanctum Essential Oil." 30 Apr. 2018. Joni Keim, educator, author, practitioner, and consultant, certificated in aromatherapy, holistic health sciences, massage, aesthetics, nutrition, and energy healing.

[6] Kumar, Anant et al. "Pharmacological and Phytochemical Evaluation of *Ocimum Sanctum* Root Extracts for Its Anti-inflammatory, Analgesic and Antipyretic Activities." *Pharmacognosy Magazine* 11. Suppl 1 (2015): S217–S224.
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[7] Mahesh Subramanian, Gajanan J. Chintalwar & Subrata Chattopadhyay (2013) Antioxidant and radioprotective properties of an *Ocimum sanctum* polysaccharide, *Redox Report*, 10:5, 257-264, DOI: 10.1179/135100005X70206
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[8] Sarvaga & Gunavati (2008) *Tulasi Devi: Goddess of Devotion: Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust*

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[10] <http://herb-pharm.com/product/holy-basil/>

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