

Smiling in spite of the heat

The dog days of North Texas summer discourage many gardeners and plants. There are, however, a few heat-loving herbs that keep on producing through July and August: **Mexican oregano** (*Lippia graveolens* and *Poliomintha longiflora*), **Mexican Mint Marigold** (*Tagetes lucida*) and **Basil** (*Ocimum basilicum*).

Mexican oregano



Also called oregano cimarrón, *hierba dulce*, and redbrush lippie, Mexican oregano is not a true oregano but offers a similar flavor when added to chili, soups, enchilada or taco sauces.

Plant in the spring after all danger of frost. A tender perennial, it survives typical North Texas winters with a bit of protective mulch. The plant prefers afternoon shade but can survive in full sun. It is not bothered by pes, and it requires some supplemental water in dry conditions. The tubular white, pink or lavender flowers are appreciated by hummingbirds. Flowers last from June through late fall.

Mexican mint marigold

Also known as Texas Tarragon, the leaves have a similar fragrance and flavor to French tarragon (a plant that is very difficult to grow successfully in North Texas).

Plant after the last frost in full sun or in a location with afternoon shade. Prefers well-drained soil. The plant is somewhat drought tolerant, but performs better if watered weekly.



The plant dies back in winter. Remove dead branches and mulch to help cold-weather survival. Shots will re-emerge from the roots in spring. Leaves can be used to flavor many dishes including sauces, dressings and chicken salad.

Basil

A popular herb for North Texas gardens, basil is an annual that should be planted when soil is warm and there is no danger of temperatures dipping below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Available types including Genovese, sweet, cinnamon, lime, spicy globe, lemon and Thai.

Place the plant in full sun in well-drained soil. Add about 3 inches of mulch to moderate soil temperature and moisture.

It is important to prune or harvest frequently. Once the plant has flowered, its energy goes into producing seeds for the next generation and the leaves become bitter. Some gardeners grow one or two extra basil plants that are allowed to flower to provide nectar for garden pollinators.

Homemade taco seasoning

- 1/4 cup chili powder.
- 1 tsp. garlic powder.
- 1 tsp. onion powder.
- 1/2 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes.
- 1 tbsp. fresh Mexican oregano
- 2 tsp. paprika.
- 2 tbsp. ground cumin.
- 1 tbsp. salt.



Mix all ingredients together. Brown 1 lb. meat thoroughly. Add taco seasoning and 1 cup of water. Simmer until most of the water is gone—about 20 minutes.

Makes 8 servings

Calories 22; Total Fat 1g; Cholesterol 0mg; Sodium 913mg; Carbohydrate 4g; Dietary Fiber 2g; Protein 1g

Green goddess salad dressing

- 2 tsp. anchovy paste or 2-4 canned anchovies
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- 3/4 cup mayonnaise
- 3/4 cup sour cream (buttermilk may be substituted)
- 1/2 cup chopped parsley
- 1/4 cup chopped Mexican mint marigold
- 3 tbsp. chopped chives
- 2 tbsp. lemon juice
- Salt and black pepper to taste



Put all of the ingredients in a blender or food processor and blend or pulse until evenly smooth, about 30-45 seconds. Serve immediately or store in refrigerator.

Makes 8 servings

Calories 207; Total Fat 22g; Cholesterol 13mg; Sodium 214mg; Carbohydrate 2g; Dietary Fiber 1g; Protein 1g

Pesto

- 2 cups fresh basil leaves
- 2 large cloves of garlic
- 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 tbsp. freshly grated Pecorino Romano cheese
- 1/4 cup pine nuts or walnuts
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste



Combine basil, garlic, cheeses and nuts in food processor or blender and process to mix. With machine running, slowly add olive oil. Season with salt and pepper. Let stand 5 minutes before serving.

Makes 8 servings

Calories 216; Total Fat 22g; Cholesterol 9mg; Sodium 174mg; Carbohydrate 2g; Dietary Fiber 0g; Protein 5g