

BACKYARD BASIL

BY WILL MAGNI

- 8th grade -

SACRED HEART SCHOOL

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Illustrated by Woodland High School



It had been three weeks since school had shut down, and my mom was trying everything she could to make sure we were still having fun, so she asked our landscaper Abraham to help us plant a backyard garden as a surprise.



The world may have shut down, but my mom's kitchen didn't. Mom has always made it a priority to prepare home-cooked meals on a daily basis, so when the world shut down on March 13, 2020, she went above and beyond to make our daily routines as normal as possible. Mom keeps a sign in our kitchen that reads, "The kitchen is for dancing," and that dancing certainly didn't stop either!

On April 3, after my sisters and I had finished all our schoolwork, my mom told us she had an extracurricular activity planned for us to do outside. When my sisters and I walked outside, we saw Abraham with shovels and plants. He was there to teach us how to plant a garden. I recognized the basil right away because my mom used basil to make one of my favorite dishes, pesto!

"Is this garden located in a good spot for the basil to grow?" I asked.

Abraham responded, “Definitely! California’s Central Valley is a great place for basil to grow because it grows best in locations that get six to eight hours of full sun daily. Without heat, basil won’t grow well.”

2. Every time a branch has six to eight leaves, repeat pruning the branches back to their first set of leaves.
3. After about six weeks, pinch off the center shoot to prevent early flowering. If flowers do grow, just cut them off.



“How long will it take before the basil is ready to be harvested? I’m ready to eat some of my mom’s homemade pesto today. It’s the best!”

“Don’t worry, buddy. It doesn’t take long at all, but there are some important things to remember:

1. After the seedlings have produced their first leaves, prune to above the second set. This encourages the plants to start branching, resulting in more leaves for harvest.

“That sounds easy enough. I’ll be sure to take extra care of this plant so I can eat some pesto in the next few weeks.”

Abraham taught me how to get my hands dirty, and we dug in the ground and inserted three basil plants. Just to make the extracurricular activity a bit more fun, my sisters and I had a dirt fight that included a lot of laughter.

Before Abraham left, I asked, “How often should we water?”

Abraham was right. After only four weeks, the basil was ready for its first harvest. I thought it would be a lot more complicated to pick the basil, but it was quite simple.



Abraham said, “The soil should be kept moist, but well drained. The basil will do great in the raised bed you have because it will allow for better drainage. Plants get thirsty just like we do, so give them a drink of water every day.”

We harvested early in the morning because that’s when the leaves are the juiciest. All we had to do was gently pull on the leaves and they fell right into our hands. My mom said our first harvest had produced enough basil to make a small batch of pesto.

At dinner, I was a little sad because I thought this would be the only batch of pesto we'd get from our homegrown basil, but my mom had some exciting news for us.



We brought the basil into our kitchen, where my mom gently washed it before putting it in the food processor with all the other ingredients for pesto. I was happy because I knew that it would be a great dinner and even more satisfying because we grew the plant ourselves.

Basil doesn't stop growing until the plant fully dies off in mid-November or when the weather changes.

Throughout the summer and early fall we had an abundance of basil. My mom made pesto to put on our sandwiches, our pasta, and even made a spicy version with Fresno chile peppers. The food was even better because it was made with homegrown basil, love, and a lot of dancing in the kitchen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



WILL MAGNI, AGE 13

Eighth grader, Will Magni, based his story on his time being sheltered in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Like the story, Will and his family planted a garden and used the items they grew to make some of his favorite recipes.

He believes having a personal connection to the topic really helped connect the facts with his imagination. Will hopes that readers enjoy the family bond in the story and see that even during challenging times, there can be positive moments.

Will is looking forward to having his story published alongside his little sister's and seeing the illustrations for his story.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATORS:



KALI KINDELT, MELIA RAJ AND GRACE REIMER

WOODLAND HIGH SCHOOL | SCOTT COPPENGER, ART TEACHER

Backyard Basil was illustrated by three art students in Woodland High School's AP Photography class. Grace, Kali and Melia are all seniors and started the project by researching different angles of photography from macro to bird's eye to see which perspective would be best to emphasize different aspects of the story. Their goal was to make the reader feel like they were right there in the garden. Prior to reading the story, the students grew up in an agriculture community and have been able to participate in agriculture and Farm-to-Fork events. They enjoyed the story and how it shared the Farm-to-Fork process.