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Basil Preserved in Parmesan Cheese

Last year I came across a process for preserving basil that seemed somewhat unusual. Rose Marie Nichols McGee, owner and president of the Nichols Garden Nursery in Oregon suggests layering fresh basil with grated parmesan cheese and freezing it in small freezer safe containers. Her strategy sounded interesting so I tried this method and then used the cheese-basil topping on a pasta dish, soup, and pizza. The basil was as near to fresh picked as I could have hoped for. It was wonderful. When I opened the container, the unmistakable scent of fresh basil filled the air. While I can't hold onto summer year round, this will certainly make those snowy evenings a bit more bearable and my winter meals will definitely be more delicious.

1 large bunch fresh basil
1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Remove the basil leaves from the stems. Discard the stems.

Rinse the leaves and dry them in a salad spinner. Pat off any excess water with a clean lint free cotton kitchen towel.

Roll the leaves into a cigar shape and cut in ribbons. You should have 1 ¼ cups of basil ribbons.

Place ¼ inch of Parmesan cheese in the bottom of a one cup freezer safe jar or freezer safe plastic container; add a layer of basil, then another ¼ inch layer of cheese.

Keep adding layers of cheese and basil until you are ¼ inch away from the top of the jar, ending with a cheese layer.

Gently pat down on the top to remove any air pockets.

Add cheese to fill the jar to the top.

Cover with the jar with the lid and freeze.

This mixture will stay fresh in your refrigerator for one week and can be frozen for up to one year.

Thaw overnight before using.

Makes about 2 cups.

Victoria Wesseler

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