

# Dried Flowers, Herbs, and Cover Crop Sold as Seasonal Decoration: Enterprise Analysis on A Small Diversified Farm



Cover crop, herbs, and flowers provide unique opportunities for small farm owners interested in diversification, increasing profit, and season extension. Each year small farms spend time cutting back flowers, herbs, or cover crop to improve health, stimulate production, or prepare ground for new crops. The freshly cut material is normally left in the field. This grant analyzed the profitability of enterprises that utilize the freshly cut material in decorative and edible value-added products.

## Crop: African Blue Basil (*Ocimum basilicum* x *Ocimum kilimandscharicum*)

African Blue Basil is a cross between West African Basil and Blue Basil. Camphor is the most prominent flavor characteristic and can be used in Italian and Asian cuisine and blended with many types of tea.

### Introduction:

Three enterprises were analyzed with this trial crop: fresh basil (bunched), dried basil (1 oz container), fresh stems in a floral bouquet.

### Marketing:

#### Retail:

- Fresh Basil was bunched and sold as a culinary herb or tea. It was an unfamiliar crop for many customers and required promotion. Twenty bunches were brought to the Summit Downtown Farmers Market on two weekends in August and seventeen total bunches sold.
- Dried Basil was harvested, bunched, and dried for storage. It is most commonly used as a tea when dried. Check your state Cottage Food laws for regulation regarding sales of dried foods.
- Fresh Stems in Floral Bouquets were harvested as branching stems and used as 'greenery'. The leaves have hues of green and purple and the flowers are light pink.

#### Added Value:

- Fresh basil bunches were an average of 0.34 lbs sold at \$3 with no added value.
- Dried basil was packed into 1 oz plastic containers. Color retention is important in the drying process to create a more marketable product. See below for resources on drying herbs.
- Fresh stems in floral bouquets were sold in mason jars at farmers markets. Our bouquets did not have sleeves or jute; each of these products improves the marketability though it also increases time and cost.

#### Why buy African Blue Basil?

Many small farmer customers are interested in new products and varieties each season. African Blue Basil as a culinary herb can bring the excitement of a new product to your market stand or community supported agriculture program.

#### Growing Practices:

- Grown on black plastic, three rows per bed and one foot spacing between plants.
- Live plants were purchased and planted in May.
- Like traditional basil varieties it will die in a frost. However, it is considered a perennial and can be brought indoors for the cold season.

#### Harvest and Post-Harvest:

*Tools: harvest clippers, bucket of water, rubber bands*

Fresh Basil bunched: Harvested by hand with clippers, bunched and placed stems-first into a bucket of water. It was stored in a dark, 50 degree cooler.

Dried Basil: Harvested by hand with clippers on a dry morning. Dried in a dark, well ventilated place.

Fresh Stems in Floral Bouquet: Harvested by hand with clippers. Stems were placed directly into a bucket of water and used in fresh bouquets within 24 hours.



## Data:

African Blue Basil	Bed Feet	Row Feet	# of Plants	# of Plants Died	Average Bunch Weight	Average Stems per Plant
<i>Ocimum basilicum</i> x <i>Ocimum kilimandscharicum</i>	10	28	28	0	0.34 lb	29

Individual Enterprise	Labor (minutes)	Total Harvested	Total Sold	Price	Profit	Cost of Production	Net Profit
Fresh Basil Bunched	67.28	20 Bunches	17 Bunches	3	51	22.42	\$28.57
Dried Basil	108.04	0.33 lbs, 5.44 oz	NA	3/oz or 48/lb	15	36.01	-\$21.01
Fresh Stems in Floral Bouquet	53.51	215 Stems	53 bouquets (4 stems per bouquet)	0.3/stem	64.5	30.73	\$47.33

\*NA Dried Basil unable to be sold due to drying conditions. Profit included above assumes all containers sold at market.

## Results:

African Blue Basil (*Ocimum basilicum* x *Ocimum kilimandscharicum*) is an easy crop to grow with little maintenance. It is downy mildew resistant and can be grown from May-October with continuous harvests from the same plant. The most profitable individual enterprise was harvesting fresh stems for floral bouquets fetching \$0.30 per stem. Using the same planting for two enterprises, Fresh Basil Bunches and Fresh Stems in Floral Bouquet, increased the total net profit by \$38.

## Conclusion:

African Blue Basil is a profitable crop that can be grown for use in fresh floral bouquets and as a culinary herb or tea. Because of its natural resistance to downy mildew, effortless crop maintenance and harvest, it is a fitting crop for small farms in New Jersey. Marketing can influence its success with customers.

## Additional Resources:

Ultra-Niche Crops: Mixed Cut Flowers for Small Farms Fact Sheet, Rutgers NJAES  
<https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs1275/>

Let's Preserve: Drying Herbs, Penn State Extension  
<https://extension.psu.edu/lets-preserve-drying-herbs>

*This material is based upon work supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, through the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program under subaward number FNE18-892.*

*The data was gathered at Chickadee Creek Farm in Pennington, NJ by Monica Drazba, a SARE Farmer Grant Award Recipient in 2018.*

*Photo Credit: Monica Drazba  
 Technical Advisor: Jenny Carleo  
 Design Credit: Kyle Stewart*