



## WELL SEASONED

BY SUZANNE PODHAIZER

# Strawberry-Basil Simple Syrup

**L**ocal strawberries are ready, and it's time to use them in just about everything until they're gone. Strawberries and basil are an elegant and timeless pairing, and this syrup captures the essence of both.

Mix it with seltzer for a fun soda, or add it to a gin and tonic. This works particularly well with Barr Hill Gin or Hendrick's—brews that are not so heavy on the juniper. You can also drizzle a little strawberry-basil syrup on vanilla ice cream.

After reading the recipe, you might wonder why I don't simply mix up the syrup first and simmer the ingredients therein. It's because of some science-y stuff. For one thing, if you make the syrup first and simmer it, some of the water will evaporate, making the final product sweeter than a rich simple syrup. It will likely vary from batch to batch unless you use the same saucepan and steeping regimen every time. Finicky points, no doubt.

Secondly, and more importantly, a rich simple syrup is a saturated solution (high school science teachers in the audience, please write in if I get this wrong). The water simply can't hold any more "stuff," including the flavor compounds that might otherwise come out of a juicy and delicious strawberry.

The other day, to get things done fast, I combined two cups of water and four cups of organic sugar, heated it to a simmer, and threw in some deep blue butterfly pea flowers. Typically, these dried petals turn everything they touch a deep, dark color. My syrup didn't change at all. The molecules that give the flowers their color, whatever they are, were stuck inside

the petals and couldn't diffuse into the syrup. I scooped out the flower petals and added some plain, simmering water. The liquid immediately turned a gorgeous, rich color. I hope that answers your questions!

### INGREDIENTS

2 cups water

10 medium strawberries (~170 grams, or 6 ounces), tops removed and sliced

10 basil leaves

Organic sugar (you'll measure out your strawberry-basil brew to get the exact amount you'll need)

A pinch of salt

Any spices you think would be a nice addition.

Cardamom springs to mind.

**Directions:** This is an easy one. Bring the water and sliced strawberries to a simmer, and cook until the strawberries have pretty well turned to mush, and the water is a lovely red.

Remove the pot from the heat, and drop in the basil leaves. Steep for around 15 minutes. Strain out the strawberries and basil. You can discard the basil leaves—or not—and toss the mush into a yogurt bowl or a smoothie.

Weigh the liquid and return it to the pot, along with an amount of sugar that is double the amount of liquid. So, if you have 100 grams of liquid, use 200 grams of sugar. Don't have a scale? No worries. Measuring by volume will get you close enough to the degree of saturation you're looking for. Same deal: measure the liquid and double it.

If the residual heat is enough to melt the sugar, that's great. If not, apply heat just until the sugar is dissolved. Pour into a glass jar for storage and let cool. Store in the fridge.

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