

Microgreens, Anyone?

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Want to add fresh, green, nutritious crunch to your meals year-round? You can grow microgreens, a true “superfood”, in a sunny window with very little expense and no fancy equipment. Missing fresh lettuce from my Community Garden plot, I decided try microgreens. Here are some things I learned from two rounds of plantings. Just like all gardening, I consider it an experiment!

Do not use soil from outdoors. Seed starting soil is best, often labeled “seedling soil” and available in 8-quart bags. Read the fine print to avoid any animal-derived ingredients that can be a source of pesticides or harmful microbes. You’ll be harvesting in 7-14 days, so fertilizer isn’t really needed.

“Microgreens” seed is no different from seed in regular seed packets, except that some seed for home gardening is treated with fungicides for protection from the hazards of growing outdoors. If not purchasing organic seed, make sure it is labeled as untreated. “Microgreens” seed is usually sold in larger quantities, making it more economical if you plan to continue planting over time.

To plant, try using a ½ pint berry box from your recycling bin, which uses about 1 cup of soil + ¼ cup water. Line the box with paper towel, extending up the sides to keep soil from leaking out the drainage holes. Fill loosely with evenly moistened (not soggy) soil; do not pack down. Cut off the box top and remove stickers as much as possible, place upside down on the box to make a “greenhouse” to help regulate moisture during germination. You’ll need a tray under the box to catch the drips and for bottom-watering.

Wash everything carefully before use, to minimize potential mold contamination. Google “mold or root hairs” so you can learn to easily distinguish normal healthy root hairs from mold infesting a tray.

For sunflowers, soak seeds in room-temperature water for 8-12 hours before planting, so they can more easily break through their hard shells. Radish and lettuce seeds don’t require soaking. About ½ tablespoon of sunflower seeds covers a berry box evenly without overlapping. Tiny seeds may require fewer to cover the surface. Do not cover the seed with soil.

Germination time depends on the seed variety and temperature; my radish and lettuce sprouted in 1 day, sunflower started right away too, but took longer for the first (seed) leaves to appear. Sunflower does not all germinate at once, but continues over a week or so. At least 5-6 hours of direct sun (but not roasting right next to window glass) is best for good growth.

Keep evenly watered with a misting spray bottle, avoiding soggy soil. If soil dries too quickly, water from the bottom by filling the tray for 5-10 minutes, then draining tray completely.

Most crops taste best when only the seed leaves have emerged, before the first set of true leaves. Taste at various points to see which you prefer for each crop. If any seeds are stuck to the leaves, you can carefully brush or pick them off before cutting. Use sharp, clean scissors to cut the stems just above the soil surface. No need to wash the greens as they will have no soil on them.

Discard soil and roots after harvesting is complete, do not re-use soil. Pop it out of the paper and leave out in the yard for small critters to munch. It will eventually compost itself if it doesn’t get eaten.

Google “growing microgreens at home” for helpful websites (you don’t need the kits they offer, while you are experimenting on a small scale.) This book, *Microgreengarden: Indoor Grower’s Guide to Gourmet Greens*, by Mark

Mathew Braunstein (Summertown, TN: Book Publishing Co., 2013) is devoted exclusively to microgreens, covering every aspect in depth. I found it invaluable, and purchased the Kindle edition. It is also available in print.

I hope you are inspired to try this easy and inexpensive way to add nutrients to your diet!

Claire has been a long-time gardener in Boulder and back east, with now 7 seasons of high-elevation gardening experience at the Estes Valley Community Garden. For information about the Garden, visit the website at evcg.org.



Sunflower (left) and 2 lettuce varieties at 8 days.



Outredgeous lettuce (left) and Green Star lettuce at 8 days.
Closely-matted roots are visible through the drainage holes in the berry box.