Green Tips
Growing Your Own Food Indoors

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In urban areas with limited outdoor space, many people believe gardening is inaccessible. However, growing supplemental foods indoors is not only possible, but also easy and incredibly rewarding. Besides offering fresh and nutritious food, it will improve your mental and physical health, enhance indoor air quality, and promote a more sustainable life.

Store-bought food often contains preservatives that allow it to travel large distances, which decrease its nutritional value while increasing its carbon footprint [1]. By encouraging families to grow their own food, they can supplement their diet with essential nutrients and vitamins from the comfort of their own homes.

Microgreen planter using recycled plastic.

Health Benefits of Indoor Edible Gardening

- **Nutrition:** Home gardening can provide easy access to fresh herbs (like rosemary and basil), leafy greens (like lettuce), and microgreens packed with vitamins and minerals [2]. These are essential for your immune system and improving digestion.
- **Mental Wellness:** Studies show that gardening reduces stress and anxiety [4].
- **Cleaner Air:** All plants undergo photosynthesis to produce oxygen from carbon dioxide, acting as a low-cost air purifier. They can remove pollutants like carbon dioxide and formaldehyde [3].
- **Physical Activity:** While indoor gardening requires less exertion than outdoor gardening, it encourages movement and fine motor skills which are applicable for children and older adults.

Gardening for Our Patients

- Introducing children to indoor gardening will help empower them to make healthy nutritional choices that can last a lifetime and engage in the conversation of where our food comes from. Growing microgreens, in particular, is a great starter project for

children because they sprout quickly and require minimal effort. These can come as simple starter kits or DIY gardening setups. Encouraging small steps like maintaining an indoor herb plant can help to progressively increase the wellness of our community.

How to get Started

1. **Choose your crops-** These can be started from seed or even food scraps.
   Herbs: basil, mint, rosemary, parsley, thyme
   Greens: lettuce, kale, spinach, arugula
   Microgreens: radish, mustard, broccoli
   Fruits/Vegetables: tomatoes, peppers, green onions
2. **Pick your container-** Any container can be repurposed as a planter, as long as it has drainage holes and a saucer to avoid waterlogging the soil and causing root rot. Microgreens require shallower trays than most plants.
3. **Soil/Growing Media-** Use an indoor potting mix or seed-starting soil for your plants. Microgreens can be grown purely in water.
4. **Light Exposure-** South-facing windows are the most effective direction for your plants to face, but east and west are sufficient as well. Most edible plants require close to 6 hours of sunlight daily. If natural light isn't enough, LED grow lights are energy efficient and support plant growth.
5. **Maintenance-** It's important to keep your soil wet, but not soggy. Overwatering can cause root rot. Microgreens and herbs require water when the top inch is dry.

References

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