



## Growing Microgreens

Growing microgreens is the most popular gardening trend around!

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Unlike most trends, microgreens' sudden fame is well-deserved and has real staying power.

Microgreens are easy to grow on one's kitchen counter and are significantly more nutritious than their fully grown counterparts, sometimes by as much as 40 times more. Arugula microgreens, for example, offer 45.8 mg of vitamin C while its adult counterpart

only boasts 15 mg.

Most importantly, microgreens taste good. At the end of the day, eating well is why most of us garden. Radish microgreens can be spicier than full grown radishes while red cabbage microgreens can be sweeter. They make a tasty addition to salads, soups, sandwiches and even a cocktail or two.

Read on for tips about growing microgreens, including some naughty tidbits about exposing your seeds and 'bottom water.'

Growing microgreens differs from sprouts in that sprouts are grown in water and are ready for harvest in one week while microgreens make their home in soil and are usually ready for harvest in two.

When choosing seeds, there is no such thing as a microgreen seed. In fact, microgreens can be grown from just about any seed. The only qualification for a good microgreen seed is how its cotyledons (or baby leaves) taste. Cantaloupe microgreens, for example, are a miserable choice for growing because their flavor is miserable. Radishes, arugula, red beets, red radishes, cilantro, basil, green peas, popcorn, red cabbage or mustard green seeds, however, are quite tasty and therefore excellent choices for growing microgreens.

The first step to growing microgreens is to fill a shallow tray (like a take-out container) that has some drainage holes in it with a soilless seed starting mix or premium potting soil. Water the soil so that it is damp but not sopping.

Next, sprinkle lots (and I do mean lots) of seeds close together. Picture a toddler adding pink sprinkles to a cupcake. Microgreens need to be seeded heavily to the point of overcrowding to make the most efficient use of space. Water lightly.

**Do not** cover your seeds with the growing medium. For experienced gardeners, it may be torture to keep your seeds naked, but naked they must be. Microgreens germinate unevenly when covered with soil or soilless mixes. If it helps your grower's anxiety, a dish towel or other dark covering is recommended to cover the seeds. This keeps the soil warm and the seeds healthier, as the cloth blocks light. But no soilless blanket!

At the first sign of growth, usually within 3 or 4 days, discard the cover and place the seeds under bright light (or grow lights or fluorescent lights, if you have them) for about 6 to 8 hours a day.

After this, the only step is to water properly, though it is one of the biggest pitfalls when growing microgreens. Microgreens in particular prefer 'bottom water.' (Feel free to giggle at the name.)

To water from the bottom of a tray, have a second small tray underneath the microgreen tray or place the microgreen tray in a sink. Fill the second tray or sink with an inch of water, and let the microgreen seed tray sit for a few minutes whenever the soil feels dry or the greens start to droop, once every two days or so.

If you must water from the top, do so gently to avoid pooling and damaging tender cotyledons.

If mold begins to develop on your soil, check that you are watering properly. Also, increase air flow or decrease humidity. Dispose of any greens that continue to be a

home for mold, despite these changes.

To harvest, give your microgreens a haircut with some clean scissors, cutting off the microgreens and a bit of the stem. Store them in glass containers in the fridge for a few weeks, though eating as soon as possible is best to avoid bacterial contamination--though this is true for all garden goodies. Clear the spent seed tray and start on your next crop.

For more information on microgreens and other indoor gardening like sprouts or mushrooms, I highly recommend Elizabeth Millard's "Indoor Kitchen Gardening: Turn Your Home Into a Year-Round Vegetable Garden."

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