

Homegrown flavor from an indoor garden

By Melinda Myers

Add some homegrown flavor to your winter meals. From microgreens to tomatoes, it is possible to grow produce indoors.

Microgreens are a quick and easy way to add some flavor and crunch to your plate. Just plant seeds labeled for sprouting or microgreens in a shallow container filled with a sterile potting or seed starting mix. Within two weeks you will be harvesting nutritious mini vegetable and herb leaves for salads, sandwiches or snacking.

Take it one step further and grow a few of your favorite herbs on a warm sunny windowsill. Select a container with drainage holes and set on the appropriate size saucer to protect your woodwork. Fill the container with well-drained potting mix and plant seeds or transplants. Purchase basil, chives, parsley, oregano and rosemary plants from your local garden center or the produce department.



Energy efficient and long lasting high intensity grow lights will provide the greatest yields when growing tomatoes and other fruiting plants indoors.
Photo/Gardener's Supply Company

Greens, like lettuce and spinach, will also grow in a sunny window or better yet under artificial lights. Grow them in a container filled with a well-drained potting mix similar to your windowsill herb garden. Plant seeds according to the seed packet. Continually harvest the outer leaves when they are 4 to 6 inches tall.

Those that like a bit of a challenge may want to try growing a compact tomato, pepper or eggplant. You'll get the best production with a combination of natural and artificial light or full spectrum lights.

Natural sunlight and full spectrum lights contain the variety of light plants need to grow, flower and fruit. Blue light promotes leaf and stem growth, while red combined with blue promotes flowering. Consider investing in energy efficient and long lasting high intensity grow lights for the greatest yields when growing tomatoes, peppers, eggplants and other fruiting plants indoors.

Leave lights on for 14, but no more than 16 hours each day. Plants need a dark period as well as bright light each day to grow and thrive. Use a timer to ensure the plants receive the right duration of light.

Most flowering and fruiting plants need a high intensity of light, so keep the lights six to twelve inches above your plants. Use reflective surfaces under and around the plants to bounce light back into larger plants.

Increase your indoor growing space by going vertical. Shelf units with built-in light fixtures provide multiple layers of

growing space.

And once your tomatoes, peppers and eggplants start flowering, you will need to shake things up a bit. Gently shake the plants several times a week, better yet daily, to move the pollen from the female to the male parts of the flower so fruit will develop. A gentle breeze from a fan or vibrations from a battery-operated toothbrush work well.

Indoor gardening won't yield the same results as a sunny outdoor garden, but the flavor can't be beat when gardening outdoors is not an option.

Gardening expert, TV/radio host, author columnist Melinda Myers has more than 30 years of horticulture experience and has written more than 20 gardening books, including "Small Space Gardening" and the "Midwest Gardener's Handbook">