

Live Free or Dig

with the Littleton Garden Club

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If you are a gardener who hovers over your young lettuces in the spring, waiting for the first delicate leaves for your salad, you can try growing micro-greens in your kitchen during the winter months.

There are two ways of doing this: sprouting or using a hydroponic garden. Sprouting is easy and produces quick results. You will need a sprouting jar, which can be a large mason jar, cheesecloth or a mesh strainer, and seeds.

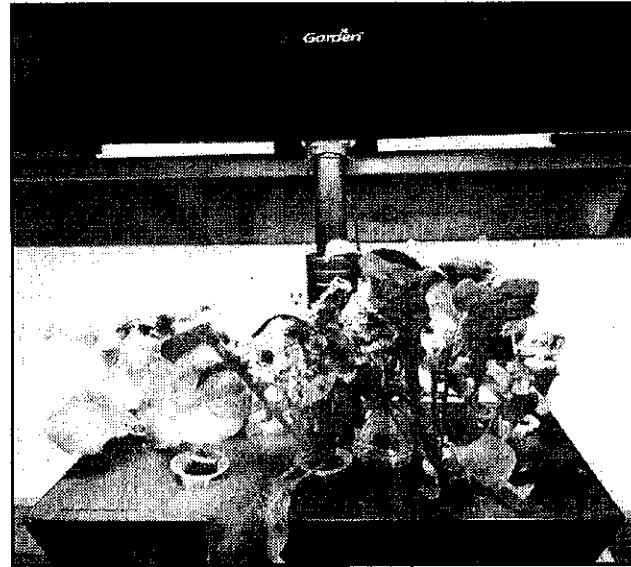
It's advisable to buy sprouting seeds that have been tested for harmful bacteria. I use alfalfa or broccoli, which have a somewhat stronger taste. The seeds and jars are available at the Littleton Food Co-op.

First, fill your jar with seeds and water, one part seed and three parts water. Then, cover the jar with your cheesecloth or mesh and secure it with a rubber band. Drain

the water through the cheesecloth. Repeat later in the day with fresh water. Place the jar away from direct sunlight.

Your seeds will quickly show signs of life. When the tiny buds are opening, put them in a place where they will get more sunlight. You can harvest the sprouts for a salad or a sandwich in five or six days. Remove the sprouted seeds from the jar and store them in the fridge. You do not need to rinse them. Use them within a couple of days. Sprouts contain high amounts of nutrients and are easy to digest since they contain high amounts of living enzymes.

With a hydroponic garden, you can grow full-sized plants and need more equipment. Mine is an Aerogarden. You can also build your own. Instructions are available online at the Readers Digest Home Gardening site. The Aerogarden measures



COURTESY

Sprouting seeds indoors is an easy and rewarding option when craving fresh winter greens.

16 by eight inches, and needs to be placed near an electrical outlet. The unit has a light on, a timer, and a water pump. It has room for six plants. As with the sprouts, plants grow in water. The water level is topped up occasionally, and the seedlings are fed every two weeks.

I like to grow arugula because it germinates in two to three days. It takes about four weeks for

the leaves to be big enough to harvest as an addition to a salad or a sandwich. It will continue to grow more fresh leaves. I also plant lettuce, basil, and parsley, which grow more slowly.

Baby spinach pairs well with arugula in a salad. Add cherry tomatoes and some sprouts. Then, a cheese of your choice, maybe grated Parmesan or crumbled feta.

Top with a lemony vinaigrette.

I use the hydroponic garden in the spring to start annual flowers. The five-pod tray is replaced by one that has space for 66 seedlings. They grow well. Like sprouts, greens grown hydroponically are nutrient-dense and proliferate. For more information about the club and our meetings, please visit littletonhgardenclub.org.

Growing winter greens indoors