

LIVE FREE OR DIG

Winter gardening

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LITTLETON GARDEN CLUB

Now that the garden is put to bed, the canning is done. Gardening can continue; you may think a greenhouse is the answer, but it is expensive and may not be possible. Here in the "North Country," we don't experience enough daylight to give our plants the 10 to 12 hours of sunlight. They need. Grow-lights can be the answer, but they need to be used properly.

The first consideration in setting up your winter garden is where to put it. You need light, water, and electricity. Remember, "gardening is messy" and requires attention. My first attempt was to buy two plant racks with three levels each and place them in my studio away from my home. This arrangement didn't work well because I wasn't there

enough for the care they needed. I did enjoy the harvest I managed of pea shoots and microgreens. So, I moved the two racks to a room in our home, called the "Garden Room." It is a concrete slab-on-grade room with indoor-outdoor carpet and 3 steps leading outdoors through south-facing doors, where all of the house plants survive the winter

Select an area for your indoor garden that is not drafty or cold and away from heat vents or a fireplace. A space that provides sufficient natural light, which is hard to find during the winter months. This is when grow lights are necessary. Purchase full-spectrum LED grow lights, which should be on only 12 to 16 hours per day. A timer can help to give the daily 8 hours of darkness that plants need to grow successfully.

Keep the grow lights several inches above the plants; remember, they are growing.

Select a container that has good drainage. In my winter garden, I use a tray the size of my shelf, available at most garden supply stores. They come with a clear plastic cover that is very useful if you are planting from seed. Remove the covers when the plant reaches one to one and a half inches. This will affect your watering schedule and require more attention.

Fill your container with high-quality potting soil. Plant your crop, seeds or starts.. Watering becomes your next necessity. Remember, overwatering is often the killer of indoor plants. Regular watering is recommended, but testing the soil with your finger will tell you if it is dry. Put your finger into the soil an inch or

two. If it feels dry, it needs water. Water thoroughly and remove any standing water, which can damage roots. Don't forget to fertilize and this can be done by adding the recommended fertilizer to the water.

Once you have your winter established, comes the fun part. Lettuce (leaf varieties), Spinach, Arugula, Pea shoots, and microgreens will provide fresh salads. Herbs of most kinds, for garnish or seasoning. Tomatoes, Peppers, and root vegetables can be grown indoors with the use of a proper container and the location of the light source. Have fun and good eating.

Littleton Garden Club is an active, fun group of people from around the area. We welcome new members. For more information, please visit: <https://littltonhardenclub.org>.