

INDOOR KITCHEN GARDENING

Easy-Grow Microgreens Are Big on Nutrition

by Barbara Pleasant

Fast, fun to grow and packed with flavor and nutrition, tender young microgreens can go from seed to table in as little as a week. Close cousins to edible sprouts, microgreens are grown in potting soil or seed-starting mixes instead of plain water. They customarily grow beyond the sprout stage until they have produced a true leaf or two. After that, harvesting is a simple matter of snipping off fresh greens.

"You don't need a green thumb to grow microgreens, only patience and persistence," says Mark Mathew Braunstein, in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, author of *Microgreen Garden*. Even first-timers can expect good results. For example, the thin shoots grown from popcorn taste like a more vibrant form of sweet corn, and pea shoots work well in wraps, salads and virtually any Asian dish.

Like high-fiber wheatgrass, "Microgreens are great for juicing, either by themselves or mixed with other veggies," says Rita Galchus (aka Sprout Lady Rita), proprietor of The Sprout House, in Lake Katrine, New York, which sells organic seeds for microgreens and sprouts. "You can add a handful of microgreens to a smoothie to ramp up the nutrition without changing its taste or texture," she notes.

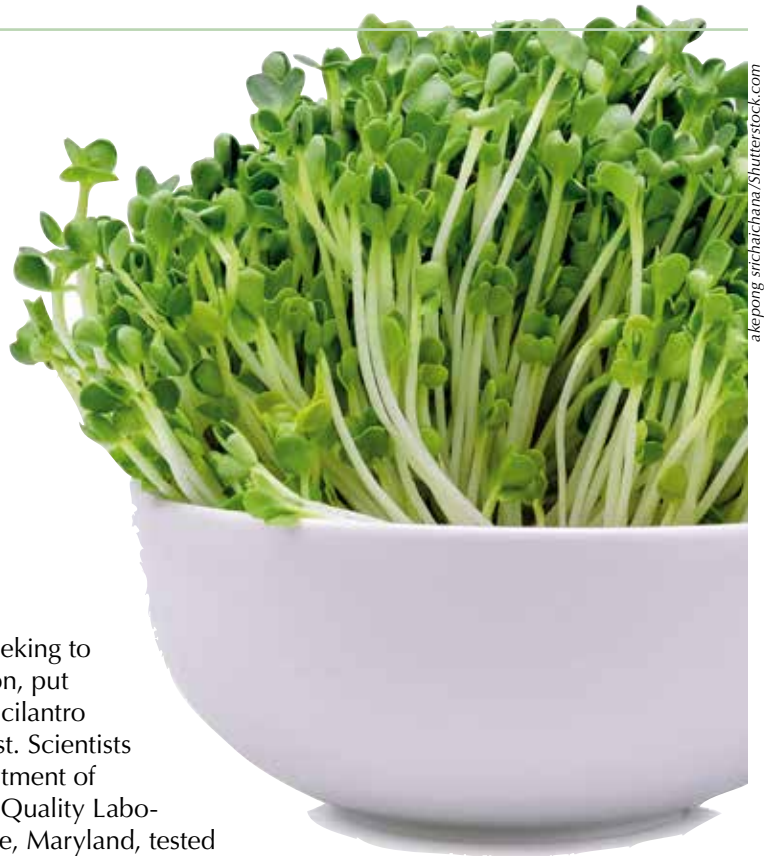
Good Picks

The seeds of dozens of plants from alfalfa to wheat can be grown as

microgreens. If seeking to maximize nutrition, put red cabbage and cilantro on the planting list. Scientists at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Quality Laboratory, in Beltsville, Maryland, tested the nutritional properties of 25 microgreens; red cabbage, cilantro, garnet amaranth and green daikon radish had the highest concentrations of vitamin C, carotenoids, and vitamins K and E, respectively. Microgreens generally provide three times as much nutrition per weight as the same food eaten in its mature state.

"People underestimate the intense flavor of microgreens and might try planting mustard greens or radish varieties even if they don't like spicy flavors," say Elizabeth Millard, an organic farmer in Northfield, Minnesota, and author of *Indoor Kitchen Gardening*. For beginners, large seeds that sprout quickly such as sunflowers, buckwheat and snow peas are good choices because they produce big, robust sprouts with mild flavor.

Many people also grow microgreens for their pets. "Cats tend to prefer mild, sweet-tasting microgreens such as red clover, alfalfa and flax seed," advises Galchus. "They also love grasses grown from hard wheat, whole barley and rye. Cats cannot digest the grass, but use it to bring up indigestible matter that might be lodged in their stomachs."



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Clean Greens

Microgreens grow so fast that there's little time for them to run into trouble. Commercial growers use large trays, but home gardeners can also use pretty coffee mugs or tofu boxes rescued from the recycling bin. Drainage holes in the container bottoms work well when growing beets or other slow-sprouting seeds, but are less important for fast-growing sunflowers or wheat.

Work only with organic seeds. Seeds sold for sprouting or bulk grains from a local health food store cost much less than the larger, robust seeds produced for gardening. Soak seeds in water overnight to jump-start germination. Place an inch or so of potting soil or seed-starting mix in the container, and then scatter the plump seeds on top. "A common beginner's error is to sow seeds too thickly," says Braunstein. Sown seeds should not touch each other, with most spaced about one-quarter-inch apart. Spritz with water and cover with a plate or plastic wrap.

At the first signs of sprouting, water and move the pot to a sunny spot near

a bright window or within two inches of a bright grow light. Dribble in small amounts of water to maintain moisture over the next few days. To harvest, cut in bunches about one-half inch above the soil line. Microgreens store well in the refrigerator for a couple of days, but are best eaten fresh.

For both beginners and experienced gardeners, growing microgreens provides a close-up look at seed germination, one of nature's miracles.

Award-winning garden writer Barbara Pleasant's new book [Homegrown Pantry: A Gardener's Guide to Selecting the Best Varieties & Planting the Perfect Amounts for What You Want to Eat Year Round](#), will be out next month from Storey Publishing.

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ORGANIC SEED SOURCES

Check with these online companies for any seeds unavailable locally.

[SproutHouse.com](#), 800-777-6887

[SproutPeople.org](#), 415-640-1280

[OrganicSproutingSeeds.com](#)

