

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER



University of Kentucky  
College of Agriculture,  
Food and Environment  
*Cooperative Extension Service*



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**HORTICULTURE EDUCATION**  
**Annette Meyer Heisdorffer, PhD**  
Daviness County Extension Office

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## Indoor Gardening in the Winter Months

The winter holiday season is over, and I am ready to garden! But wait, the temperatures are too cold for most of my favorite vegetables. How can I grow vegetables during the winter months? Indoor container gardening fills the winter vegetable gardening gap.

Indoor container gardening refers to growing plants in containers instead of in a tilled plot of land or outside in raised beds. Winter container gardening brings plants indoors from the cold in the fall or starts new plants, and uses small spaces such as windowsills and tabletops.

Even though the variety of crops that can be planted in container gardens is not as numerous as in traditional outdoor gardens, there are still many plant options. Dr. Durham, University of Kentucky Extension Horticulture Professor, has several suggestions.

Scallions, also known as green onions, are one option. The tip of the scallions can be cut off with the roots and placed in a glass with about an inch of water. When the roots are 2 to 3 inches long, plant them in potting soil in a shallow container. Harvest the green tops and let the plant continue to grow or use the entire onion.

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Another option is to grow garlic greens. This process involves planting a garlic clove in a few inches of potting soil mix to grow the greens that emerge from the clove. A bulb will not form but the green portion, leaves, tastes garlicky and serves as a good substitute, either served raw or sauteed.

A third option is growing carrots. They are easy to grow in potting soil. Sprinkle the carrot seeds on top of the soil in a pot or long window box. Lightly cover the seed with some of the moistened potting soil or peat moss and water well. Keep the carrot tops. They are edible and nutritious and can be used in soups, sauces, and even smoothies.

Herbs can also be grown indoors. Basil, chives, and parsley are very easy to grow indoors. Parsley requires more humidity to grow best, so misting the plants will help them flourish. Use organic fertilizer to help them reach their full potential.

Microgreens are great for a winter indoor garden. Microgreens refer to small edible greens grown from the seeds of vegetables and herbs such as broccoli and beets. Microgreen seeds must be sown very thickly in shallow pans with potting soil. According to Ray Tackett, Extension Agent for Horticulture Education in Bourbon County, microgreens grow really fast and need no fertilizing, as all of their needed nutrients come from the seeds. In 12 to 14 days, on average, there is a finished product that is flavorful and packed with nutrients.

Microgreens obviously are grown a little bit differently than normal herbs and vegetables. Microgreen seeds should be labeled for use as microgreens only to ensure there is no coating on the seeds that may contaminate the growing young plant. There are about 50 herb and vegetable seeds you can grow for microgreens, such as broccoli, beets, and some mustards. Pre-soaked

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seeds can produce a finished product in about seven days, but 12 to 14 days is more typical. You can grow some of the larger seeds, like mung beans and sunflowers, as microgreens. Larger seeds may take 21 days to mature.

Microgreens average 4 to 5 inches tall when fully grown and can be used fresh in salads, wraps, or garnishes. Because microgreens are used fresh and grow close to the soil, make sure to sow the seeds in new, clean potting soil in shallow containers. Disposable aluminum pans make perfect containers with 1 to 2 inches of potting soil. Place the pans inside or near a sunny window or use grow lights.

One of the biggest challenges with indoor gardening is the lighting limitations. While using as much natural light from windows as possible, some plants may need additional light with the help of grow lights. Grow lights are available in different price ranges and styles. Also, the type ranges from full-spectrum fluorescent lights to LED lights. LED lights are more expensive than fluorescent lights but use less electricity. Incandescent bulbs do not emit the right spectrum of light for plant growth.

Another issue is ensuring the containers have proper water drainage. Use potting soil in the growing containers because it provides good drainage. Make sure the containers have at least one hole for drainage and are placed in a detachable saucer or inside a tray to catch extra water. After the water has drained into the water-catching vessel, empty excess water to lower the risk of root rot.

Even though you are using clean, presumably “sterile” potting soil, wash with water any plant parts thoroughly before consuming, especially if using them raw.

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For more information about gardening indoors, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or email [Annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu](mailto:Annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu).

## **Annette's Tip:**

The full effect of the below-zero Fahrenheit temperatures in December on fruit and ornamental plants is not known at this point. Fruit buds have been destroyed, but not sure how it will affect the yield. Some ornamental plants were damaged. At this time, we will have to wait and see what happens to the plants. Some ornamentals will come back from the roots or stems, while others have lost flower buds. Each species of plant tolerates below-zero Fahrenheit temperatures differently.

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