

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



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Continue Gardening Indoors during the Winter
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The cold wind is blowing and winter is here, but I want to grow vegetables. Indoor winter gardening in containers provides an opportunity to grow several types of vegetables during the cold winter months.

Winter container gardening brings plants indoors from the cold in the fall or starts new plants using small spaces such as windowsills and tabletops. Growing plants indoors in a container avoids tilling a plot of land or growing in raised beds outside in the cold.

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.

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

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Another option is to grow scallions, also known as green onions. 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 while the plant continues to grow, or use the entire onion.

A third vegetable option is growing carrots 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. Even the carrot tops are edible and nutritious and can be used in soups, sauces, and 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, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, 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 flavorful finished product that is 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 and beets. Pre-soaked seeds can produce a

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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, 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 near a sunny window or use grow lights.

One of the biggest challenges with indoor gardening is the limitations of lighting. 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 wave lengths in fluorescent lights and LED lights. LED lights are more expensive than the fluorescent lights, but use less electricity. Incandescent bulbs do not emit the right spectrum of light for plant growth.

Another issue is making sure 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 on top of 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 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.

Annette's Tips:

Another activity during the winter is learning more about gardening. The Kentucky Hort News website, www.kentuckyhortnews.com, contains five seasons of videos from the Horticulture Webinar Wednesdays on many gardening topics from growing vegetables to flowers to trees.

When outdoors hiking or working in the woods, check yourself and pets for the blacklegged tick. This is the only tick species that tends to be active year-round in Kentucky. It is the only vector of Lyme disease. Blacklegged ticks have a reddish-brown body, dark head, long mouthparts, and dark legs. Males have a dark plate that covers their whole body, while the dark plate only covers half of the female's body.

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