



March is For Gardening: A Miniature Salad in Your Windowsill

How to grow your own microgreens

Fairy gardens, lunchbox peppers, dollhouse furniture, and baby animals - everyone loves tiny things! How about growing your very own tiny garden right on your windowsill? This article is for all audiences no matter the age. Miniature salads are called MICROGREENS and they are so simple to grow that everyone should give it a try.

Take a look at the word microgreens. The prefix “micro” means tiny. The word “greens” tells me I am eating the leafy part of the plant. Microgreens are different from sprouts because of how they are grown. Sprouts grow in a watery environment and microgreens are actually sprouted in soil. Both plants are eaten when they are tiny and young, but you only eat the leaf and stem of microgreens while you eat the leaf, stem, root, and seed coat of sprouts.



Planting your own microgreens are not only cute and fun but fall into the category of **superfoods**, foods that are packed with nutrients and enhance a healthy diet. Since microgreens are harvested when they are so young, they retain a much higher level of nutrients than their grown-up cousins. For instance, kale microgreens offer about 40 times the nutrients than a fully grown kale leaf!

What foods can be grown as microgreens?

First, make sure you are buying seeds that are sold for the purpose of microgreens or sprouts. This will ensure that the seed has not been treated with any chemicals that you would not want to ingest.

The easiest family of plants to grow as microgreens are the brassicas, or cabbage family plants. This includes:

- Kale
- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Radish



They sprout quickly and easily and grow to harvest size in about 7-9 days.

Once you have mastered growing brassicas you can experiment with various crops to add color, texture, and flavor to your menu. Options include:

- Beets
- Arugula
- Mustard greens
- Swiss chard
- Basil
- Amaranth
- Chia seed
- Peas
- Sunflower seeds
- Corn



Activity: Planting Your Own Microgreens

Materials:

- Organic potting soil
- Small container, about 2-5 inches tall
- Microgreen or sprout seeds
- Piece of paper towel (to cover the container)
- Marker and tape (to label)
- Small watering can or spray bottle

Steps:

1. Check your potting soil. If it is very dry, pour some out into a bowl and get it moist. Soil should be wet enough to clump together when you squeeze it but should not drip water when squeezed.
2. Once your soil is moist enough, fill your container with soil and press it firmly, especially in the corners. Soil should be about an inch below the top of the container.
3. Add your seeds! Sprinkle your microgreen (or sprout) seeds over the top of the soil. Sprinkle enough seeds to cover about 50% of the soil surface.
4. Lay the piece of paper towel over the top of the seeds. (No, you don't have to cover the seeds with soil!)
5. Using your watering can or spray bottle, add enough water over the top of the paper towel to make it wet. This will help the seeds **germinate** (or start growing).
6. For the next 2 days, check your seeds and add a little water to keep the paper towel moist.
7. On day 4, you can peel back a corner of the paper towel to check if your seeds germinated. You can tell if they germinated because tiny roots and stems will be poking out of the seeds. As soon as you see this happening for most of the seeds, you can (carefully) peel back the paper towel cover and give the container a little bit of water to moisten the soil surface. (Never overwater your microgreens or you may get fungus!)
8. Place your container in a sunny window or under a grow light. The seeds will turn bright green and grow taller when exposed to sun.
9. Each day give them a small amount of water.
10. When your microgreens are about 2 inches tall, you can start to harvest! This usually only take about 7 days, but some seeds grow more slowly and can take up to 14 days.



Microgreen pea seeds spread over potting soil in a recycled plastic container. In about 12 days, the pea shoots will be ready to eat!



Left: Sprouted microgreens moved under a grow light to “green up”.

Right: “Basic Salad mix” microgreens ready to be harvested!



Harvesting the microgreens

“Harvest” means “gathering crops”. One of the reasons microgreens are so easy is that they are ready to harvest in about 7 days! There is no other garden crop you can grow that quickly.

To harvest your microgreens, you can either use a pair of scissors to cut them or you can use a sharp knife. Either way, watch your fingers so you don’t cut yourself. You can cut all of the microgreens at one time or just cut what you want to eat. You can place cut microgreens in a baggie, and they should last several days. If you only cut what you need, make sure to cut them all within 1 week or they will start to get overgrown.

What to do with microgreens

Sprinkling microgreens over the top of almost any food makes it so much for fancy and beautiful! They are elegant and delicious over scrambled eggs or quiche, in a sandwich or wrap or as a garnish for soup or pizza. They add a healthy kick to smoothies and juiced veggies and fruits. If you have enough, you can make a full salad of microgreens!



Kid’s Enrichment: Collecting Data

Scientists often use **charts** to collect **data** (or information) so they know what happens during an experiment and whether it worked or not. Below is a chart you can use to track your microgreens! You can change different parts, or **variables**, in an experiment. In this experiment, maybe you want to grow the same kind of seeds in two different types of soil and see which grows better. The soil would be your variable. Or maybe you want to have the same kind of soil but plant 2 different kinds of seeds! The seed would be your variable. In a good scientific experiment, you only change one **variable** at a time, so you know what is causing the change.

Under your observations, you can record in words or draw pictures. You can measure your plants too! On the day you harvest your microgreens, you can write that, and you don’t need to record any more observations after that.

Extensions: You can make a **line graph of your data** to show your variables! Use a different color for each variable. Write a **conclusion** to show your results and what you learned.



Microgreen Growing Observations

Date of Planting:				
Type of Soil:				
Type of Seeds:				
Day 1 Observations:				
Day 2 Observations:				
Day 3 Observations:				
Day 4 Observations:				
Day 5 Observations:				
Day 6 Observations:				
Day 7 Observations:				
Day 8 Observations:				
Day 9 Observations:				