

Your indoor herb garden equals a culinary delight



Fresh herbs and recently picked ingredients can add flavor to any meal. A home chef can even improve the flavor of store-bought or prepared foods with an herb garnish that can transform otherwise bland dishes into something you'll want to eat again and again.

Harvesting fresh herbs is easy for homeowners who have gardens right in their backyards. However, everyone does not have a backyard, and even those that do might find their gardens threatened by changing seasons or unwanted critters. When gardens are moved indoors, the bounty of fresh ingredients continues no matter the date on the calendar.

Herb gardens are perhaps some of the easiest gardens to cultivate indoors because they don't require large pots or much space. The plants themselves are relatively compact, and it only takes a pinch of herbs to give a meal some extra flavor.

When growing herbs indoors, your indoor growing area must have adequate light to simulate the longer days of summer; otherwise, the plants may go dormant. It's ideal to have a southern exposure on the herbs, with at least eight hours of sunlight per day. If you do not live in a particularly sunny locale, consider supplementing the plants with grow lights, which will provide the full spectrum of light the plants need to thrive.

Indoor air can become too dry for herbs, so you will need to compensate by providing humidity. While there may be added humidity in a kitchen greenhouse window, it still may not be enough to keep the plants healthy. Think about misting the plants daily to create some extra humidity, or place herb pots on top of a water-filled tray with pebbles so the evaporating water will add moisture without making the roots soggy.

Insects are another threat to in-

door gardens because there is no cold weather to inhibit the hatching of insect eggs. Soil from outdoors may be more susceptible to insects that are already living in the dirt. Instead of soil from outside, use packaged soil or a nonsoil alternative that will hold moisture without the added risk of bugs. If small insects appear, use a mist of soapy water to kill the bugs without harming the plants or making the herbs unfit for eating.

Group herbs together according to their watering needs to make maintenance that much easier. New sprouts generally need more water than established plants.

Prune the herbs as needed for recipes. If the herbs experience a growth spurt, trim some of the plants and freeze the herbs for later use.

Many indoor herb gardeners begin by growing parsley, chives, oregano, and basil, but you can experiment with just about any herb.

A sunny location is necessary when cultivating an indoor herbs garden.

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