

Grow quick, easy, nutritious microgreens year-round

By MELINDA MEYERS
Special to The Messenger

Add fresh flavor to your meals year-round with microgreens. These easy-to-grow greens need minimal space and no special equipment for a flavorful and nutritious harvest in little more than a week.

Use microgreens on salads, soups, pizzas, omelets, in stir fries or as a snack. These tiny seedlings are packed with more nutrition than their mature counterparts.

Add a bit of spice to soups and sandwiches with radish and mustard microgreens. Try red cabbage, chard, beets and amaranth for some added color. Sunflower's somewhat nutty flavor makes it perfect for snacking. Let some of your pea microgreens grow a bit taller to use in stir fries.

Fill a shallow container with a two-inch layer of moist potting or seed starting mix. Sprinkle seeds over the soil surface and lightly cover with potting or seed starting mix. Water gently to ensure good seed-to-soil contact.

Continue to water often enough to keep the soil slightly moist. Reduce your workload and keep the planting mix consistently moist by covering freshly planted containers with plastic. Once the greens break through the soil, remove the cover and move the container to a sunny location or under artificial lights.

Increase the fun and success with a microgreen growing kit like the Organic Herb and Microgreens Grow Kit from Gardener's Supply (www.gardeners.com). This set up is the perfect size for your countertop or other small space. The full spectrum light is adjustable so you can raise or lower it as needed whether growing short microgreens or taller herbs.

Or skip the growing mix and mess with a Jute Microgreens Starter Kit. Set the jute mat in the shallow tray, add seeds and water. Then compost the jute mat after harvesting your greens.

Follow the planting directions on the seed packet. You typically need two to



GROW KITS — Small grow light kits make growing herbs and microgreens indoors easy and convenient for harvesting and cooking. (Photo courtesy of Gardener's Supply Company)

three tablespoons of seeds for an 11-inch x 21-inch tray. Buy enough seeds to make additional plantings every week or two to ensure a constant supply. Microgreens like most vegetables taste best and are most nutritious when eaten fresh. And these tasty bundles do not last long in storage.

The microgreens are ready to harvest once the plant forms the first set of true leaves. These are the leaves that resemble those of the mature plant. This takes anywhere from seven to 14 days, depending on the room temperature and type of microgreens you are growing.

Use scissors to clip the greens off at ground level. If you prefer to use the whole seedling, roots and all, you will need to wash off any of the seed starting mix clinging to the roots.

Once you harvest all the greens, it is time to replant. Save money and be kind to the environment by composting the used planting

mix and reusing containers. Convert shallow fast-food containers into planting trays. Disinfect these or other planting trays before using them for subsequent plantings. Just soak the containers in a 10 percent bleach and water solution for 10 minutes. Then rinse in clear water before planting.

Gardening doesn't get much easier than this. You will enjoy the fresh flavor all winter long as you wait for the outdoor growing season to begin.

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Editor's note: Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including "Small Space Gardening". She hosts The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything" DVD series and the nationally-syndicated Melinda's Garden Moment TV & radio program. Myers is also a columnist and contributing editor for Birds & Blooms magazine. Her website is www.MelindaMyers.com.

Managing a difficult insect pest

By MELINDA MEYERS
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A sticky substance on plant leaves, plant stands and the floor are often the first clue alerting gardeners to a problem. If a closer look reveals bumps on the upper and lower surface of leaves and stems, it means scale insects have moved in to dine on your houseplants. Severe infestations can cause leaf yellowing, stunting and dieback of the plant.

If you have battled these insects, you know they can be challenging to control. Arm yourself with an understanding of their life-cycle and be persistent to successfully manage these pests.

Scale insects have needle-like mouthparts that allow them to pierce the leaf and stem surfaces. They suck plant sap through a tube-like structure just as if they were drinking from a straw. These are one of several insects that secrete drops of a clear, sticky substance, called honeydew, as they feed. A black fungus known as sooty mold may grow on the honeydew. It does not directly harm the plant, but it looks bad. In severe cases, sooty mold can prevent sunlight from reaching the leaves, causing them to yellow.

Adult scale insects form coverings that protect them from adverse environmental conditions and most chemical controls. Eggs hatch under this protective covering and the immature scale, called crawlers, emerge looking for a place to feed. Once settled, the crawler continues to grow, shedding layers of skin. These layers of shed skin, or waxy layers, form their protective covering.

Isolate infected plants as soon as you discover the problem. This will reduce the risk of this pest spreading to your other plants.

You can remove the adult scales with a toothpick,



PESKY PESTS — Scale insects may be dining on your houseplant if you notice a sticky substance on its leaves and bumps on the upper and lower surface of the plant's leaves and stems. (Photo courtesy of MelindaMyers.com)

tweezers or an old toothbrush. Repeat every few weeks until you have this pest under control. This may be sufficient to control small populations, but if you miss even one adult the problem persists.

The crawler stage is the most susceptible to chemical control. You will need a hand lens or magnifying glass to see these short-lived crawlers. Insecticides and washing small plants with a plant-safe soapy water solution can help manage small populations. Cover the pot and soil to prevent any scale knocked off during the bath from crawling back onto the plant.

Increase your chance of success with the help of an organic insecticide like Summit Year-Round Spray Oil (SummitResponsibleSolutions.com). This lightweight oil suffocates and controls all stages of the scale insect, including the adult and eggs housed under the protective covering. Repeat applications are needed to get this insect under control.

This product is safe

for people and pets while harmful to this and other houseplant pests. As always read and follow label directions for the most effective results.

Clean the pot, saucers, plant stands and the area around infected plants to remove any honeydew and unseen crawlers. This along with proper control will reduce the risk of these insects infesting treated and nearby plants.

Continue to monitor all your plants for scale and other insects each time you water. It is much easier to manage small populations than larger infestations on more plants.

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