

Windowsill Gardening

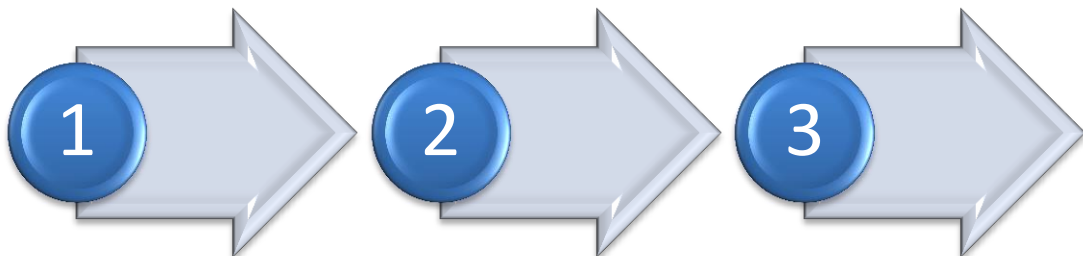
How to grow fresh,
healthy, organic produce -
in 3 easy steps

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Save money, eat healthily, be 'green'

With this report, it's as easy as



THREE EASY STEPS TO GROWING YOUR OWN ORGANIC, HEALTHY HERBS & VEGGIES (EVEN IF YOU DON'T HAVE A GARDEN!)

If you want to:

- Save money
- Be eco-friendly / green
- Add delicious touches to your meals
- Eat more healthily
- Achieve satisfaction from growing your own produce – easily

Then you've come to the right place!

Imagine the pleasure of using your own freshly-picked herbs to enhance every meal in your home! No more buying herbs at the supermarket and most of it going soggy in the fridge before you use it!

**You are just THREE
STEPS away from
enjoying your own
deliciously fresh
produce!**

Windowsill Gardening – The Easy Way

If you have a windowsill, you can grow your own herbs and even some vegetables!

The great thing about windowsill gardening is that you can do it even in the tiniest apartment. Or the largest house. Or anything in between.

What will it cost? You can set up your windowsills on a shoestring budget, or spend a bit more and go for gourmet varieties and/or attractive pots. Once you're set up, you'll SAVE money by growing your own produce instead of buying it.

The Three Steps are explained in detail below, here they are in summary:

Step One: Decide, Plan & Prepare

Step Two: Create the Right Environment and Plant

Step Three: Grow, Harvest and Improve

There are a couple of things that people get wrong with windowsill gardening. The main one is that *most people skip Step One*. It's a bit like building a house without a foundation. But with this report, you'll learn how to avoid this and other mistakes. Step One is easy (like the other Steps) and it builds the foundation for great indoor gardening. Let's get started!

STEP ONE: Decide, Plan and Prepare

This step is all about looking at your home from a fresh perspective.

The first thing you need to know is: Can I grow plants on my window sill? Will they be able to thrive? This report will show you how to tell. And the good news is that most homes can support windowsill gardening - even the tiniest apartment often has a suitable place. If you live in a large home you can also benefit from windowsill gardening –herbs can be grown conveniently in the kitchen, and you can bring outdoor plants indoors for winter.

After that, you'll look at what plants you'd like, and decide whether to grow from seeds or seedlings (or both). It's an easy Step, but don't ignore it!

Here's what you need to know:

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To find out if you can grow useful plants indoors, you need to know if you have the right:

- Amount of sunlight or artificial light
- Temperature




Indoor plants need at least 4 hours of sun per day

Just how much sun do you need? To grow plants successfully, you need an area which receives at least 4 hours of sun a day.

If you live in the Northern Hemisphere, a south-facing window is the best, but east and west-facing windows can also work. North-facing windows will greatly restrict what you can grow.


In the Southern Hemisphere, north-facing windows give the most light, but may provide too much heat, and so may west-facing windows. Windows facing in the other directions may be best suited to indoor plants. If however you have shade outside the window (e.g. a patio or overhanging roof or blind), then north-facing windows may be suitable.

 *TIP: Don't look only at window sills. Also consider kitchen worktops, small tables and other surfaces close to a source of light. All of these can be used to grow plants indoors!*

If your growing space is dark, artificial light can take the place of sunlight. The details are in Step Two.

If you don't have much sunlight, grow salad greens and herbs that require less sunshine; but remember, they still require bright light.

Take a look around your home with a fresh viewpoint. I'm sure you'll be able to find a suitable spot.

 *Tip: with indoor gardening, your ability to move a container from shade to sun and from a chilly location to a warm location almost assures success!*

Now consider the temperature of your home. Summer crops grow best at temperatures between 75° and 85°F (24 - 29C) in the daytime and 60° and 75°F (15-24C) at night. Autumn and winter or cool-weather crops grow best at temperatures between 60° and 65°F (15-18C) in the daytime and around 50°F (10C) at night.

Of course plants (especially herbs) can grow in temperatures outside these ranges – you just need to be more careful with the varieties you choose. For example, it's

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more difficult to grow lettuce in tropical conditions, as they prefer a cooler climate. Nonetheless it is possible – choose an oakleaf variety, give them some shade and never let their roots dry out.

Most herbs need full sun – at least 6 hours a day. That said, containers can really bake on a hot day, so if you live somewhere where temperatures soar, your herb container gardens may need to be shaded during the hottest part of the day.

✚ *TIP: Good air circulation indoors will help keep plants healthy.*

If you use an air conditioner in the room where you're growing your plants, you might need to humidify the air.

✚ *TIP: A bowl of water left close to the plants will work well if you don't have a 'proper' humidifier.*

A word on the best times to plant your herbs and vegetables. You will have a greater chance of success if you plant vegetables indoors at approximately the same time as they would be planted outdoors. Herbs on the other hand are easier – many of them grow year round when planted indoors.



Now that you know *WHERE* you're going to grow your plants, you now need to decide *WHAT* you are going to plant. There is a huge range to choose from – in fact, the choice can be quite bewildering! Stick to these guidelines and you will make the best choices:

Decision: What to Plant: Herbs:

The best herbs for windowsill gardens are those that stay **dense and compact**. Parsley is a great option for indoors if you keep it well trimmed (more on that later).



Mint is also perfect, and comes in a wide range of flavours. Marjoram / oregano / origanum also works well indoors, as does thyme. Basil and coriander are firm favourites.

Other choices are chives, lemon balm, chervil, rosemary, lavender and dill.

All of these herbs are happy in small pots (4-6" / 10-15 cm containers) that fit nicely on a sill.

✚ *TIP: If you are new to gardening, it might be wise to first grow the easier herbs, such as parsley and mint.*

Plant pots are measured
across the top (diameter)

ved

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Then, once you have some experience, move on to the other herbs.

Herbs such as parsley are great to grow indoors. Parsley is rich in vitamins and adds flavour to food. It's generally very happy growing indoors and it continues to grow throughout winter – very handy as it saves you getting wet / cold to go outside to pick some!

✚ *TIP: You need to like the smell of their foliage if you're going to grow plants indoors.*

Decision: What to Plant - Vegetables

To grow vegetables indoors on your windowsill or ledge – “Ledge Veg” as Britain's National Trust calls them! - look for dwarf or fast-maturing varieties of your favourite vegetables. Your garden centre will be able to help, or the packets of seeds should tell you. Dwarf varieties of cabbages, for example, include Baby Head and Modern Dwarf. Small versions of carrots are called Bunny Bite, Little Finger, Short'n'Sweet, Thumbelina and Tiny Sweet. The seed packets or your garden centre will also tell you how far apart to plant them, and how long they will take to mature.

Leafy vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, chard, green onions, and cabbage can thrive with just five hours of sun each day. Root vegetables such as radishes, carrots, and beets need an hour or two more. Fruiting vegetables require the most sun and warmth; cucumber, eggplants, peppers, and tomatoes insist on at least 8 hours of full sun each day. The same is true for beans. Cherry tomatoes continue to grow as you harvest the tiny tomatoes, and the plant looks great too.




You can either grow whole lettuces or sprout baby leaves and pick them quickly. Whole lettuces tend to work best if they're 'cut and come again' types, where you can remove a few leaves from one lettuce (or even most of the top of the lettuce) and a few days later new leaves will grow back. They tend to be open lettuces like lollo rossa and even mizuna.

✚ *TIP: Tomatoes, peppers and cabbage plants are probably the easiest veg to grow (if you have enough sun), and are thus recommended if you are beginning your gardening journey.*

Do you want quick results? No problem. Buy seeds of baby leaves and microgreens. They sprout quickly (10-21 days) and thrive in shallow punnets, There are many varieties that lend themselves to this such as: sorrel, dandelion, lambs

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lettuce, most conventional lettuces, rocket, cresses, chicory, endive, corn salad, radicchio, arugula, purslane, chervil and certain edible varieties of nasturtium and mustards. You can buy ready-made mixtures of these seeds, including mesclun mix and others, or just buy them singly according to your taste.

 *TIP: microgreens add flavour, crunch and colour when you add them to sandwich and salad toppings, or mix them into soups, casseroles, dips, pizzas and even breads.*

Do you want almost immediate results? Certainly! Sprouted seeds, grains and pulses can be ready to eat in as little as **two days**! Popular sprouts include alfalfa, chick pea, green lentil and aduki bean, but you can also sprout sunflower seeds and even broccoli seeds. Try mung beans if you want to grow the beansprouts that are used in many Chinese stir-fry dishes.

The Bottom Line: Grow what you eat or what you think is beautiful. Some people grow sage because it smells great. Others grow basil for use in cooking and also to make pesto, which can be frozen and used throughout the winter. It's up to you!

Decision: Seeds or Seedlings?

You can plant your crops in either seed or seedling form. Seeds are tiny and sold in packets; seedlings are tiny plants, already growing.

Not sure which route to take? Read this section and you'll know what's best for you.

If you buy and plant seeds, they will take longer to grow and require a bit more work. But they are normally cheaper than seedlings.

Seedlings are baby versions of the plant. They grow more quickly (so you'll be able to harvest sooner) but they're more expensive than seeds.

It's your choice – seeds are cheaper but take longer and are a bit more work; seedlings are more expensive but are quicker and easier.

In the next step you'll see how to plant, but at this stage



you simply need to decide whether you'd prefer to save money and do some more work, or spend some money and save work.

Decision: Containers

This is where you can get really creative! Get into re-cycle mode – look around your home and see what you can use.

✚ *TIP: put an old yoghurt tub inside a pretty teacup, put pot noodle cartons inside a planter or box of some sort.*

✚ *TIP take used tins of beans, remove the labels and you have industrial-style planters!*

Avoid shallow containers that will cramp roots and can either dry out quickly or become waterlogged.

Perforate the base of any container so excess water will drain away.

Always place your containers on trays (or saucers, or anything that will retain water) so that the containers don't leak directly on to your windowsill.

✚ *TIP: If you are using a container that's been used before, be sure to wash it thoroughly before planting.*

Any container will do for an indoor herb garden. Just make sure that there is proper drainage in the containers you choose.

Put breakable pots in a stable position.

How big should my container be?

Always choose as large a container as possible. Dwarf varieties of beans, cucumbers, green peppers, and tomatoes require two-gallon (7½ litre) pots. (Long, narrow containers of this size are often best for most windowsills).

Radishes, lettuce, scallions, cress, parsley, carrots, and chives, and other herbs flourish in a container six inches deep and about six inches wide (15cm wide and deep).

A single small vegetable such as a lettuce or spinach will grow in a six inch (15cm) pot. A 12 inch (30cm) pot will accommodate four lettuce or spinach plants. An 18-inch (46cm) pot will hold as many as ten herbs.

You've now completed Step One – the initial decision-making. If there's one thing people do that causes problems with indoor herbs and vegetables, it's not planning properly. By making the easy decisions listed in Step One, you're already ahead of the game!


Step Two – Create the Right Environment, then Plant


In Step Two we purchase any necessary supplies, set up the perfect environment, and then plant!


Here's a handy **checklist** of what you'll need to purchase:

- ✓ Seeds or seedlings
- ✓ Containers – if you don't have enough at home already that you can recycle / re-use.
- ✓ Soil – the best soil for your indoor plants is organic potting soil¹ – it contains everything the plants need and you don't have to worry about getting the mixture “just right”.
- ✓ Fertiliser – buy some organic compost and in Step Three you'll see how to use it effectively.
- ✓ Pesticides and herbicides – you're going organic so no need for any chemicals. Step Three will cover what to do.
- ✓ Artificial lighting if your room is too dark – see below for details.

Your local supermarket will have most of these items, except for seedlings. Garden Centres often have broader ranges of seeds too.

 *TIP If you buy seedlings, you will often see either tiny seedlings or tall, leggy ones. In this case, the smaller plants are better – they will normally outgrow the taller ones and be stronger.*

 *TIP, some supermarkets or plant nurseries offer seed 'starter packs' (e.g. a mix of different herbs) at very good prices.*

 *TIP always look out for cheap seeds of the plants you want - even if you're not going to plant them right now, buy them while they're cheap!*

Artificial Lighting

If your room is too dark to provide the amount of sun required to grow your chosen plants, and/or you want to supplement winter light, then artificial light is the way to go. Of course this increases your costs – buying new lights if necessary plus the cost of the electricity.

¹ Just because it says “organic” on the bag, is it really organic? Look for an OMRI certification label, and check the ingredients list for something like “poultry litter from organically-raised chickens”.

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You can use either fluorescent lights or ‘grow lights’. Choose grow lights designed for plant growing (lights rich in the red and blue spectrums are needed by plants for photosynthesis).

The light should be close to the plants – no more than 18” (46cm), so they don’t grow scraggy trying to reach up to the light.

✚ *TIP hang the light on chains, so you can raise the light as the plants grow.*

Keep the light on for about 10 hours a day.

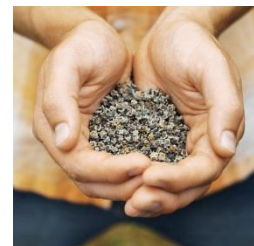
Now that your environment is ready, it’s time to plant!

How to plant seedlings

1. Make sure your container is clean and has holes in the bottom for drainage.
2. Half-fill the pot with potting soil, loosely packed so the roots can grow easily.
3. Remove the seedlings gently from their packaging. Be sure not to damage the main stem, as this is vital to the life of the plant.
4. Position your seedlings in the container. Make sure top of their soil is below the level of the container.
5. Finish filling in with the potting mix, firming gently around the plants. Leave about an inch (2cm) at the top of the container for watering.
6. Water gently and place in their new home!



How to plant seeds:

1. Make sure your container is clean and has holes in the bottom for drainage.
2. Fill the pot with potting soil, loosely packed so the roots can grow easily. Leave about an inch (2cm) at the top of the container for watering.
3. Read the instructions on the seed packet and follow them. Sprinkle small seeds on top of the potting soil. Larger seeds should be counted and planted individually, just below the surface of the soil.
4. Water gently and place in their new home!



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Here are some more great ideas:

-  *TIP swap half a packet of seeds with a friend if you have more than you need of one type.*
-  *TIP if you're not going to use all the seeds in the packet, give the rest away / swap them out promptly, as some seeds don't germinate as well the following year.*

You've now completed Step Two – setting up your perfect environment, and planting. In Step Three, you will reap the rewards!

STEP THREE – Grow, Harvest & Improve

In this step, you'll see how to look after your plants, by watering, feeding and weeding them – again, you'll see there are loads of tips on making this easy! Then harvesting tips, and finally, how to improve your crops!

Watering your Plants

This is probably the area where most people fail. It is estimated that up to 90 percent of plant deaths are from overwatering (yes, 90 percent!). Here's how to make sure it doesn't happen to you.

Use this wonderfully easy way to tell if your plants need water. Simply stick your finger in the soil - if your finger comes out wet or damp, then the plant is fine. If your finger comes out dry, water the plant until the water starts to trickle out of the bottom of the pot.

Here's a really crucial idea: establish a watering schedule that will be easy for you to remember. For example, when you get water for your first morning coffee or tea, check if your windowsill plants need water too.

Why? Because inconsistent watering is another reason why plants fail. When you have an easy-to-remember routine, you won't forget.

Herbs especially don't like 'wet feet'. For any plant, too much water can result in fungal disease.



 *Use room-temperature water and if possible, avoid water softened with a commercial water softener.*

Water indoor plants in the morning on sunny days when possible.

Evaporation will be slowed on cloudy and cool days. Plants require less water in cooler weather and winter.

Feeding your Plants

For healthy and vigorous growth, your plants will appreciate some fertiliser. For this, you need organic compost so that you can make compost tea to feed your plants.

Ideally of course you would create your own organic compost in your garden, but if you don't have it, no problem! Simply buy organic compost, take a handful or two and soak it in water. Then use the resulting "compost tea" to spray on to leaves or

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pour onto the soil. This will replenish the nutrients that the plants have already taken up out of the soil.

Feed your plants once or twice a month once they are actively growing. Feed them less often when temperatures are cool.

Protecting your Plants from Pests, Diseases and Weeds

Aphids, mites, and whiteflies can attack indoor vegetable crops. A simple way to avoid this is to give your plants a rinse under the kitchen faucet / tap every two weeks. Then spray the entire plant with lukewarm water. Check the undersides of leaves to make sure any insects / bugs have been washed away.

Spraying compost tea onto the leaves of your plants will aid disease resistance – you'll be doing this anyway for fertilizer.

Another great idea is that whenever you water, you should look for weeds and remove them right away. Also, trim away any dead leaves or debris and check for insect pests.

Harvesting Your Plants

This is the fun part!



How do you know when you can start using your herbs? Easy – once you see lots of new growth!

The best advice for herbs is to keep them trimmed – this is easy, since the whole point of growing them is so that you can prune and eat them! Use them in salads for added flavour, in addition to the other cooking recipes you use them in. Herbs also make great garnishes.

The rule of thumb is the more you pick, the more you'll get.

Snipping them also keeps them bushier and well formed. Another benefit is that by constantly snipping them, you can usually keep them from strangling each other!

All except basil, which needs good air circulation so it doesn't really like crowding.

As for vegetables, well, once you've tasted freshly-picked organic vegetables, you'll never want to go back to supermarket ones!

✚ *TIP: Re-seed the pots continuously so you have a constant supply, or keep a couple of pots which grow the same item, one pot planted later than the other, so while one is growing, you can harvest the other.*

At the start of the next season, it's best to begin again with fresh, nutrient-rich soil.

Excess Herbs

What can you do if you find that your herbs grow faster than you can use them? Try these suggestions:

- ❖ freeze them and use them later,
- ❖ use herbs like mint in ice cubes (place a leaf in water in an ice-cube tray then freeze and use in drinks),
- ❖ make the surplus leaves into wonderfully scented herb sachets (leaves in muslin tied with a pretty ribbon).

Remember too that herb container gardens make great gifts. You can do themed containers, like a 'pizza garden' or a '*herbes de Provence*' herb gardens, or combine herbs and edible plants in a pretty basket.

How to Save Money on New Plants

Here are some more great ideas on how to get seeds and seedlings for free.

- ✚ *TIP friends and neighbours with gardens and/or greenhouses might give you surplus seedlings for free.*
- ✚ *TIP try asking nicely (esp. in Spring) on websites such as Freegle.org.uk (in the US, most Freegle groups are hosted on Yahoo Groups, and many can be used from Facebook). Freegle (free and legal) sites encourage you to give things away rather than dump onto landfill sites.*

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Growing plants indoors is especially fun and rewarding. When you are able to eat delicious vegetables and herbs that you have grown yourself it is even more exciting!

Indoor gardening is a wonderful tool for those who have very little space and for those who are unable to bend. Indoor gardeners also love the fact that there is very little weed problem and no hot sun burning down on them.

For every size of home, it's great to bring the garden indoors!

You've now completed all Three easy Steps to growing your own organic healthy herbs and vegetables – congratulations!

An oft-quoted recipe for happiness is to nurture something. Nurture your windowsill garden and you will feel a sense of accomplishment, save money, enjoy great meals with fresh herbs and veggies, help the environment, and feel happy!

P.S. You'll find more great organic gardening tips and ideas at [EcoFriendlyLink](#) as well as lots of information on living a green and eco-friendly life. (There's also a wonderful free gift when you sign up for my weekly newsletter called EcoFriendly Matters).