



A Perfect Day to Grow Greens

Microgreens are a good way to use up last year's seeds.

by Carol Barany for Yakima Master Gardeners

Dead winter? No problem. Just find a bright window and presto, fresh greens for your salads.
DEVI PUSPITA, UNSPLASH PHOTO

For information on the Yakima County Master Gardeners Program:

<https://extension.wsu.edu/yakima/home-garden/master-gardeners/>

It's way too early to plant most seeds outdoors, but it's never too soon to start planning.

In late January, the women of my garden club have always gathered (we'll do it virtually this year), our favorite seed catalogs in hand. After much discussion, we'll each settle on a few intriguing varieties, and grow more than we need for ourselves. In May, the extras are shared at a plant swap. This is a great way to enjoy an array of new plants, without having to grow them all yourself.

Preparing for a new seed order prompts me to dig out all the packets I already have. Some are marked with a future "best if used by" date, while some are expired. Some seeds are in un-dated home-made envelopes. Does anyone else find it difficult to toss unused seeds?

I found a handful of nearly-new or half-used seed packs of radishes, salad greens, basil, and sugar snap peas. Combine that with a good measure of hope and divine inspiration, and it's the perfect day to plant some microgreens.

Microgreens are the tiny shoots of vegetables and herbs. Don't confuse them with sprouts. Seeds germinated in water



just long enough for roots, a stem, and pale, immature leaves to emerge are sprouts, and you eat the whole thing.

Microgreens are grown in soil and sunlight until their first true leaves open, and that's the part you harvest. With delicate textures, piquant flavors, and vibrant colors, you'll want to add these tender, nutrient-dense wonders to your favorite salad, or layered in a sandwich.

Many readers have school-aged children at home these days. Helping them grow their own microgreens could be the easiest way to introduce them to an array of anything-but-ordinary vegetables and herbs, since microgreens taste just like the mature plant. Along the way, they'll learn some basic botany that could spark an interest in more home gardening in the spring.

Your first batch can be ready in less than two weeks. Even better, it's likely you already have most of the supplies you'll need.

1. The tubs that salad greens and other produce come in at the grocery store are perfect. Punch a few drainage holes in the bottom, wash, and sanitize (soak for 30 minutes in a 1: 9 ratio of bleach to water). Rinse, and fill with 2" of moistened potting mix. Use a spatula or square of cardboard to gently press the soil flat and even.
2. Carefully scatter the seeds over the soil. If you have any seeds left from last year's garden, use 'em up. A density of about four to six seeds per square inch allows for growing room and air circulation. The list of plants that lend themselves to micro-growing includes chia, kale, mustard, dill, watercress, peas, basil, onions, cabbage, broccoli, beets, radishes, mesclun, and even sunflowers. Many seed companies sell microgreen seed mixes, featuring a combination of greens that sprout at the same time.
3. Press the seeds into the soil using your spatula or square of cardboard. Use a wire-mesh sieve and cover the seeds with 1/8" of sifted, dry potting mix.
4. Water the seeds in with a fine spray of water. To keep them moist until germination, cover the soil surface with a clean, wet paper towel. Set the container on a rimmed, water-proof tray.
5. Grow on a sunny south-facing windowsill. If your home lacks sunshine, you can use a grow light, shop light, or desk lamp positioned about 3" above the

container. Ideal air temperature is 65°–75°F, and fertilizer isn't necessary.

6. As soon as the seedlings begin to push the paper towel up, remove it, and continue to keep the soil consistently moist but not soggy. Watering by soaking the container from below will prevent soil from splashing the plants, but don't let the container sit in water for long.
7. After the first true leaves appear, grab your scissors and cut the greens just above the soil line. Rinse, spin dry and eat. Once cut, microgreens won't re-grow. Start more seeds in a second container the day you start harvesting the first batch.

Can food gardening get any easier than this? You may enjoy microgreens so much that you start buying seeds in bulk, a much cheaper way to grow, than by the single pack.

