

# How to keep your herbs growing indoors



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**Q**uestion: I really enjoyed growing my own fresh herbs and vegetables this summer. Is it possible to grow them indoors during the winter? And if so, can you provide information on how to go about it?

**Answer:** Just because winter is right around the corner, you do not have to give up growing your own herbs and vegetables! By bringing your gardening skills indoors, you can have access to fresh, homegrown food year-round.

You may not be able to replicate your full outdoor garden, but there are quite a few plants you can grow indoors under the right conditions.

Whether you are starting with seeds, cuttings (some starts can be generated by rooting in water) or new plants, as with growing plants outdoors, certain conditions are needed in order for them to thrive – and for vegetables, the appropriate conditions to produce flowers and fruit. Light is one of the most important conditions; plants will need at least six to eight hours per day.

A good location is in a south facing window.



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**Indoor plants need assistance with pollination. This can be done by lightly shaking the plants or by brushing the blossoms with a small brush to transfer the pollen.**

For some plants this will be enough light to grow and thrive. However, our short and cloudy winter days will not be enough for many plants. For those needing more light, you can achieve this by using a full spectrum florescent bulb. Place the light directly above the plants, and consider putting the light on a timer to make sure the plants get the required amount of light each day.

In addition to light, soil type, the amount of water and humidity are

also critical for growing healthy plants. Begin with a quality soilless potting mix. This will help avoid soil born diseases, and will also help with drainage.

When considering a pot, choose a 6-12 inches deep unglazed pot with drain holes – it is also important to place the pot in a saucer to catch the water. Indoor plants can dry out quickly with the heat from furnaces and wood stoves, so regular water and humidity is important. Humidity around the

plants can be increased by placing pebbles in the saucer, along with regular misting of the plants with water.

As for what to grow, herbs are a fairly easy choice for a kitchen garden. A sunny southern window often provides sufficient light. Not only are herbs an attractive kitchen decoration, they are also handy for snipping off just what you need when cooking.

If space is limited, consider herbs that grow more tall than wide, such

as chives, basil, tarragon, parsley or rosemary. Other herbs to consider include thyme, lavender, oregano and mint. Herbs all do well with regular harvesting – snipping off 2-3 inches encourages more branches. However, for parsley and cilantro you will want to cut the entire stem off. The new growth will fill in from the bottom.

There is no need to limit yourself to herbs. Vegetables can also be grown indoors – however, they will need more and consistent

light. This is where adding a full UV spectrum florescent light helps.

A sampling of vegetables to consider includes loose-leaf lettuce, radishes, carrots, cherry tomatoes (some varieties are better for indoor), onions, spinach, scallions and bush beans.

Water regularly to keep the soil moist. This is especially important when the plants begin to flower and fruit. Because they are not outside, they will not have bees to aid in pollination, so your assistance is needed.

This can be done by lightly shaking the plant (such as with tomatoes) or by brushing the blossoms with a small brush to transfer the pollen from a male to a female blossom. The addition of fertilizer every couple weeks will also help encourage growth and fruit. And if outdoor pests discover your indoor garden, treat by liberally spraying with a mixture of dish soap and water.

Happy indoor gardening!

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*Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu), by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*