

Microgreens – Tiny, Tasty Tidbits You Can Grow

By Kate O'Lenic

Microgreens are quite the thing these days. Recent research suggests they are loaded with nutrition. They have intense flavor and look fabulous as a garnish. Sure, you can buy microgreens at a grocery store. But we gardeners are DIY! Here's the inside scoop on what they are, how to grow them, when to harvest them, and how to use them.

Microgreens, as the name suggests, are tiny versions of their larger selves. They are the shoots of plants with seed leaves or only two true leaves. Depending on the plant, microgreens are 1 to 4 inches tall. They are packed with intense flavor, are vibrantly colored, and add a special something to salads, soups, and sandwiches. There are at least 60 plants you can grow and use as microgreens. Surprisingly, the list includes beets, broccoli, Swiss chard, sweet corn, fennel, and peas, among others. If you are not sure what to grow, check out the resources at the end of this article or do an online search for microgreen seeds. Some companies have specific sections of microgreen seeds.

Growing microgreens is easy. Seedling trays are good containers to use but any clean container with bottom drainage will work. If you want to start small, you can use clean clamshell trays like those that blueberries are sold in at grocery stores.

There are several options for the growing medium. Seedling mixture is a good choice. It holds moisture, contains fertilizer, is free of pathogens, and drains well. You don't need much, just 1 to 2 inches will work. The downside of this peat/vermiculite mixture is that it can hang on to the seedlings. There are also paper and growing pads sold for growing microgreens. However, these do not contain fertilizer, and a dilute soluble fertilizer will be needed. You could also buy kits sold specifically for cultivating these shoots.

Here are some tips about seeding the growing trays. Premoisten the growing medium before sowing the seeds. It helps the seeds sit more firmly on the medium and helps with germination. Spread seeds by hand evenly and avoid overcrowding. Larger seeds will require a bit more space, ½ to 1 inch, than small seeds and require a top coating of growing medium. Small seeds, perhaps planted 10 to 12 small seeds per square inch, don't need to be covered but give them a gentle push into the growing medium for good contact and keep them moist. A spray bottle misting is recommended to avoid disturbing the seeds.

These plants can be grown indoors if they can receive 5 to 6 hours of sunlight or about 8 hours of fluorescent light. The area needs to be warm – 65 to 75 degrees. A sunny windowsill, greenhouse, or three-season porch are all possible locations to consider. Too high a temperature can kill those tender shoots; too cool and they may be slow to germinate or may not germinate at all.

After sowing the seeds, keep the growing medium moist but not soaked. Water from the bottom by placing your container in a tray of warm water for a few minutes to allow absorption into the growing medium. Then remove it to avoid overwatering.

Your crop of tiny, tantalizing shoots can be ready to harvest in just 7 to 21 days when they have seed leaves or two true leaves. Using clean scissors or a clean, sharp knife, and cut these delicate greens as close to the growing medium as possible to maximize crop yield. Gently rinse off any growing medium, place them on towels and carefully pat dry. If not used right away, store in a rigid container to avoid damaging the tender greens.

These shoots are best used raw. They can be used whole as a lovely garnish, a tasty topping on a salad or soup, or whatever your imagination creates. You could eat them alone as a snack! For microgreens of herbs, chopping them brings out more of their flavor. Regardless of how you use them, they'll add a welcomed punch to any dish.

Resources

Foods 2019, 8, 250; doi:10.3390/foods8070250 "Evaluation of the Bioaccessibility of Antioxidant Bioactive Compounds and Minerals of Four Genotypes of *Brassicaceae* Microgreens," Beatriz de la Fuente, Gabriel López-García, Vicent Mániz, et al.

Growing Microgreens at Home, <https://extension.sdstate.edu/growing-microgreens-home>

Growing Microgreens, <https://extension.psu.edu/growing-microgreens>

Microgreens, <https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/edibles/vegetables/microgreens.html>

The ABCs of Microgreens, <https://extension.psu.edu/the-abcs-of-microgreens>

Small-Scale Microgreen Production,

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/W346-J.pdf>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, "ASK A MASTER GARDENER" to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.

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