
UNH Cooperative Extension Info Line Question of the Week

Windowsill Gardening

Q. What food can I grow on my windowsill this winter?



A. Growing food indoors in the winter can be both fun and educational although you won't save a lot of money doing it. In New England winter days are short and light intensity is low because the sun is over the southern hemisphere. If you have good southern or western windows it's relatively easy to grow culinary herbs. Chives, thyme, oregano, sage and marjoram are all easy to grow and will thrive if they get 4-6 hours of direct sun. Rosemary is a little more difficult; as a native of the Mediterranean it prefers full sun and cool temperatures in the 40s and 50s. Basil is also tricky; it's a heat loving plant and tends to limp along if you can't provide both warmth and

supplemental light. If you can find it, try Blue African Basil; it's more adapted to our winter conditions. If you decide to grow herbs, try to find small plants at a garden center. You'll have more to eat much sooner than if you start plants from seed.

Greens are also a possibility. If you're growing them at room temperature, choose and try the ones you like to eat. If plants stretch and are skinny and floppy they need more light. Using a combination of cool and warm fluorescents or full-spectrum fluorescent bulbs for 16 hours a day should eliminate this problem. With both herbs and greens you want to use a box or container with drainage holes, a well-drained soilless potting mix, and a light hand with a soluble fertilizer. Water only when the top inch or two of soil is dry. During cloudy periods roots won't take up much water and can rot if the soil is saturated.

Got questions? UNH Cooperative Extension Education Center's Info Line offers practical help finding answers for your lawn and garden questions. Call toll free at 1-877-398-4769, M-F, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., or e-mail us at answers@unh.edu