



JUST GROW IT:

How to Start Your Own Salad Garden Indoors By Dana Freeman



Have you been looking for a way to encourage children to eat their vegetables? Help them make the connection from earth to plate! Children love hands-on work and are more apt to eat those foods they help to grow and prepare. (You can also insinuate lots of science and nutrition factoids into your conversation while working together.) When you and your children grow your own produce, you are reducing the distance your produce travels and your carbon footprint, as well as assuring that your food is organically grown and prepared in the safest way possible. So, let's just grow it, already!

Step 1:

Find a sunny spot indoors like a south-facing window. If your windows don't receive a minimum of 5 hours each day, you might consider setting up a simple grow-light system or using a purchased aeroponics kit with lights built-in.

Step 2:

Choose planting containers that will fit in your sunny space. For example, translucent clamshell boxes used to package greens at the grocery store also make ideal mini-greenhouses for growing lettuce indoors. Use other recycled materials (e.g., plastic bottles, cottage cheese container, halves of grapefruit, Ziploc bags, etc.) or interesting containers like boots, shoes, ice cream buckets, hats, baskets, or aluminum pie tins. Not only are you saving money but having fun reducing, reusing, and recycling!



Step 3:

To get the containers ready for planting, they must have good drainage. Use the tip of scissors or a knife to drain holes in the bottom of each one. Remember that moisture may come through the bottom, so sit your planters on trays or an old cookie sheet or to collect any excess water.

Step 4:

Add 1.5 to 2 inches of moist potting soil before planting a pinch (about 25) lettuce seeds, barely covering them with soil. You can let kids choose other seeds that they might want in their salads, like arugula, spinach, Swiss chard, radishes, peas, chives, etc. Note that lettuce germinates in light, so there is no need to even cover them with soil. Follow the planting-depth suggestions on seed packages for other vegetables.

Step 5:

After generously spritzing the surface with water from a spray bottle, shut the clear clamshells, bottles, or bags or cover containers with plastic wrap to keep in moisture and heat while seeds germinate. Then, place them in your window or under your grow light. If you use a grow light, keep the lights on for about 12 hours each day.

Step 6:

Five to ten days later when the seeds are up and growing, remove all coverings. Those that you can, place under the containers to use as watering trays. The soil usually stays fairly moist if you check on your plants and mist with water every day, but try not to let them dry out.

Step 7:

The first lettuce cutting is usually ready in 3 to 4 weeks. If you hold your container sideways, you can snip the leaves right into a colander, keep the growing crowns intact, and never dirty the greens. It is still a good idea to rinse them in cold water before eating.

Step 8:

Congratulations! You and your children have just grown your first crop of edible greens. You should celebrate with a little harvest party and share your salad at lunch or dinner.

Step 9:

The fun does not stop there! You should be able to cut your lettuce again in about 2 weeks.

During the times you are planting, watering, and harvesting with children, you can learn what they really know about what they eat. You can then share nutrition and vitamin information and health benefits of various vegetables. See below for information on leaf lettuce from Fruits and Veggies More Matters (http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/?page_id=210)

Did ya know...

The term Leaf Lettuce describes the varieties of lettuce with leaves that branch from a single stalk in a loose bunch rather than forming a tight head. The leaves are crisper and more full-flavored than those of the Head Lettuce varieties.

How to Select

Choose lettuce with crisp leaves.
Avoid brown edges.

How to Store

Rinse well and dry with paper towels.
Refrigerate leaf lettuce in plastic bag up to 1 week.

Nutrition Benefits

Fat free; saturated fat free; very low sodium; cholesterol free; low calorie; high in vitamin A; good source of folate.

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 1½ cups shredded (85g)			
Amount Per Serving			
Calories 15		Calories from Fat 0	
		% Daily Value*	
Total Fat	0g	0%	
Saturated Fat	0g	0%	
Trans Fat	0g	0%	
Cholesterol	0mg	0%	
Sodium	35mg	1%	
Total Carbohydrate	2g	1%	
Dietary Fiber	1g	4%	
Sugars	1g		
Protein	1g		
Vitamin A	130%	Vitamin C	6%
Calcium	2%	Iron	4%
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:			
		Calories	2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less Than	65g	80g
Saturated Fat	Less Than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less Than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less Than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g
Calories per gram:			
Fat	9	Carbohydrate	4 Protein 4

You need not be an expert to garden with children. Your time, patience, and dedication as a mentor are what really matters.

Remember, the best thing you may ever grow is a gardener!