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Growing herbs on your windowsill

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Before I realized how easy it is to grow my own fresh herbs, I would either put dried sickly-looking herbs into my recipes or spend a fortune at the grocery store buying some variation of "fresh" herbs - think those limp bunches of parsley that look like they were harvested last year! And then came the epiphany, when I decided to bring a rosemary plant in from the summer garden and try to keep it alive on the windowsill. It worked! I not only had rosemary for my focaccia bread (recipe below), but I also noticed a wonderful scent whenever I walked past my windowsill. Encouraged by this success, I decided to take the leap and try growing indoor herbs from seed. I had tried this in the past with little success, so my expectations were low. This time I researched some basic information and didn't scrimp on soil or fertilizer, and my windowsills are now abloom with herbs! I am sharing my secrets for success with you, and hope that you will soon enjoy both the taste and the sight of an herb garden during these cold days of winter.

1. First, keep it simple! Most herbs can grow well indoors, but the best to start with are thyme, parsley, mint, and oregano. If you want to add one more, go with lavender - it may not grow as enthusiastically, but it will smell great. Herbs are not demanding plants. They only need sunlight, water, soil, and a little love.

2. Choose a location with good sunlight: Place the pots near a bright, sunny spot, such as a south-facing window, where they can get six to eight hours of uninterrupted natural light daily. Enough sunlight is key. If you don't have direct access to natural light, use LED or grow light to mimic

the sunlight.

3. Select the right pots: When choosing a container, ensure it has proper drainage holes with a saucer or protector underneath. Choosing the right size pot for properly growing your herbs is essential. Choosing a pot that is too big is probably one of the most common mistakes. Start with one plant in a four-inch pot and, after your plant is "outgrowing" its pot, transplant to an eight-inch pot. Never start with a big pot! It is also important to think about air circulation. Don't crowd your herbs - they need at least a couple of inches of space between pots to "breathe"

4. Soil and fertilizers: Like the right size pot, choosing the right soil helps your herbs thrive. Use an indoor potting mix as it helps the water drain well and allows roots to grow and breathe. Never be tempted to use old outdoor garden soil as it is too compact for indoor plants. Don't scrimp on the soil - you won't need much, so invest in a high-quality indoor potting soil, and don't forget to fertilize! I use good old Miracle Grow, highly diluted, once a week

5. Planting seeds: If you are new to indoor herb gardening, start with seeds instead of transplants or cuttings. For planting seeds:

- Moisten your potting mix and make it a little damp.

- Carefully read the directions on the packet of seeds and how deep they need to be planted for proper growth. Some seeds need to be planted at half or a quarter inch deep, while others need more sunlight and should be sown on the surface.

- You can use a heating pad under your pot for the first couple of weeks to help speed up germination.

6. Watering: How much you should water indoor herbs depends upon the herb and factors like humid-

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ity and temperature in the room. Woody herbs, such as rosemary, thyme, oregano, and sage only need a little water. On the other hand, basil, cilantro, parsley, and mint need more moisture and regular watering to grow. Before watering, check the soil in the pot by sticking your finger 2 inches inside. If the soil's top layer is dry, it is time to water your plants. As a rule of thumb, you should water the indoor herbs two to three times a week.

7. Harvesting: Clipping herbs at the right time promotes bushy growth and increased production. For herbs like cilantro, basil, and mint, snip a few inches from the top of each stem. For oregano,

parsley, and thyme, cut from long stems with few leaves. To maintain a healthy plant, never cut more than 1/3 of a plant in harvesting.

8. Additional tips: Moisture and humidity help herbs grow and stay healthy. A windowsill above or near a kitchen sink or a bathroom windowsill are great places to grow your herbs because they will love the extra humidity during the dry winter. If your windowsill isn't big enough, any sunny room will work if you mist your plants every couple of days. To grow your herbs at an appropriate temperature keep them in a room that can sustain a temperature of 65 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit during the day and 55 to

60 degrees Fahrenheit during the night.

So now you are ready to buy a few seed packets and get started! The best thing about indoor herb gardens is that they are easy to grow and maintain with basic care. However, choosing a bright and well-ventilated space, proper pots, and soil for healthy production is essential. Also, ensure good air circulation and appropriate humidity and temperature to enjoy a continuous supply of fresh herbs.

And here is that Rosemary Focaccia Recipe I mentioned at the beginning of this article:

Ingredients:

1 large potato, cooked and mashed (you can cook in micro-

wave)

3 1/2 cups flour

2 T olive oil

1 T instant yeast

1 tsp. salt + 1T coarse kosher or "fancy" salt for garnish

1 cup warm water

2-3 T of chopped FRESH rosemary from your own plant!

Mix flour, yeast, potato, warm water and 1 t salt and let rise 1 hour. Spread in well-greased 10X15 pan. Make "fingerprint holes" in the risen dough. Drizzle olive oil, coarse salt and rosemary into the holes and on the surface of the dough.

Bake at 425 degrees for 25 minutes. Serve warm!

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