



Tower Gardens Allow Indoor Growing to Flourish

by Lolli and Bob Leeson



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While most people know the value of eating high quality produce, very few can say that they know where the fruits and vegetables in their kitchen actually come from. Those that are serious about eating fresh, nutrient dense food can cultivate their own gardens during warm weather. But what about during cold New England winters, when most of the produce sold in local stores is not vine ripened and comes from an average of 1,500 miles away?

Individuals that take their growing indoors can seriously cut that distance and enjoy fresh produce from living room window to kitchen table. This is due to advancements in what's known as aeroponic gardening, which maximizes yield by growing vertically. It's a modern day twist on the technology used at Epcot Center's Living with the Land exhibit at Walt Disney World.

This next generation of urban farming is highly efficient and self-contained. One such system, the Tower Garden, is soilless, growing produce in nutrient-dense, oxygenated water that is pumped from a reservoir to the top of the unit, where it cascades down and bathes the plants' roots as it falls. Even someone with a "brown thumb" would have a difficult time over- or under-watering plants, because the process is controlled by a timer. Lettuces, herbs, leafy greens, chard and kale are particularly good for this kind of indoor growing, but larger plants like cucumber, zucchini, pepper, tomato and

eggplant can also thrive.

As with any successful garden, space, light and temperature are important. The most common mistake the average indoor grower makes is not giving plants enough light, which is critical when growing inside. Sunny windows help, but winter days are just too short to provide adequate light for plants. To assist Mother Nature, indoor growers can use several T5 fluorescent lights, which use 54 watts of electricity each. During summer, the towers can move to a sunny patio, where artificial lights are no longer required.

Aeroponic gardening is a wonderful answer to the challenge of supplying the bulging population with locally sourced, nutrient-dense, sustainably grown produce—in any place, at any time of year. Vertical farming is part of that solution, allowing people to grow food in 10 percent of the space normally used for traditional soil farming, using only 10 percent of the water and nutrients typically required for outdoor growing. Moreover, vertical gardens also serve as interesting, verdant centerpieces for improved indoor air quality and lend themselves to cutting-edge interior design.

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