

# Gardening in Jars

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How do we keep fresh vegetables in our diet through the wintertime, if we do not have a green house or a high tunnel? Well one way that has been around for centuries is to grow sprouts. This is an easy way to supplement our diets and add some variety this time of year. Typically alfalfa sprouts are available at most grocery stores, which really limits the variety that is available.

One way to grow sprouts is to use a quart mason jar with some moist seeds keeping the jar warm then watch them grow. First start by selecting some seeds such as: radish, alfalfa, fenugreek, Chinese cabbage, clover, beans, peas, lentils, sunflower seeds, wheat, barley, oats, etc. use your imagination and taste preferences to start with. Next find a source for your seeds, make sure they are not treated, there are online sources, and most health food stores or some grocery stores will sell seeds for sprouting. Also, check out the local feed store if you are looking for bulk seeds that are cleaned, remembering that a little seed goes a long way. However if seed is kept cool, dry and out of the light it will last a long time.

After you have purchased your seed, the next step is to soak the seed overnight. When selecting seeds to use make sure, your combination has similar sprouting times. Then you need to rinse the seed and place it into a clean jar with a mesh netting or cheesecloth covering the opening. The jar can then be placed on a counter with indirect sunlight. At least several times a day rinse the seeds, which keep them moist. With plenty of air, some indirect light and warm temperatures within several days the seeds should start sprouting.

By starting one jar every day or so this will give you a steady supply of sprouts. It is important not to over crowd the jar so for the first few times it is better to use less seeds until you get the hang of it, say one or two tablespoons. This also allows the opportunity to try different combinations and different seeds. Getting kids excited about gardening indoors is easy with this process since it is simple and the seeds germinate within a couple of days. This also is an opportunity to have the kids involved with meals, and having some quality family time.

For those that want to take this to the next level there are kits online or at stores which allow for more sprouting, and there are sprouting charts available also. The commercial trays that are available have the advantage of stacking, therefore taking up less counter space and they are not very expensive.

It is best to use the sprouts within a couple of days, to keep them from spoiling, with the high moisture level, and as with every vegetable the fresher the better. Therefore, by adding some sprouts to a salad, stir-fry, a sandwich, or soups or stews, this not only adds variety but also adds a fresh homegrown vegetable. There are many receipts available or the sprouts can be added to your own favorite receipts. When your friends come over and ask what that green stuff is growing in the jar, you can say dinner!

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