

Rock Your Salad with Microgreens

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(Article published in Gainesville Sun on October 1, 2016)*

Are you trying to eat healthy, but you are getting bored with lettuce and salad dressing? Microgreens is a new and delicious way to eat your “greens.” Tender, colorful and packed with flavor and nutrients, microgreens can be used on salads, sandwiches, smoothies, soups, and main dishes. They are easy and inexpensive to grow.

Microgreens, often called “vegetable confetti” are young, tender greens. Microgreens are not the same as sprouts. Sprouts are the youngest and smallest of the seedlings, harvested when there are just cotyledons (first two baby leaves) with roots and all. Microgreens are slightly larger and older with the first set of true leaves (usually 2 inches tall). Only the stem and tender leaves are harvested. Baby greens are the oldest and largest (usually 3-4 inches tall).

You can find grown microgreens at farmers markets, high end restaurants, and some local grocery stores. Prices for grown microgreens can be an astounding \$30 to \$50 per pound and are often packaged in plastic clamshell containers in small amounts.

There are nearly 100 crop varieties that can be grown as microgreens. Lettuces are not grown for this purpose because they are too delicate and wilt easily. You can choose seeds based on flavor, color, or texture. If you want a spicy mix, grow mustard, radish, arugula, or watercress. If you prefer a milder flavor, choose kale, broccoli, cabbage, sunflower, basil, or carrot. If you have a sweet tooth, add some sweet English peas to your mix. To add color, choose purple basil, amaranth, red cabbage, red mustard, beet (soak first), and purple kohlrabi.

Buy untreated seeds. Seeds can be found locally and online. Some sources sell microgreen specialty mixes, such as “sweet,” “mild,” “colorful,” or “spicy.”

It’s easy to grow microgreens. You just need a shallow container or tray, a fine potting mix, and seeds. You can buy a seed-starting potting mix, or mix your own using peat, vermiculite, perlite, or coconut fiber (coir). I often buy blocks of coir and just use that to grow seeds. You can also grow them on special growing mats or burlap.

To start your microgreens, fill your container, or nearly fill it, with potting mix. Place the seeds on top of the potting mix and lightly cover with additional mix. The layer of seeds should be somewhat thick, but not too much.

Mist them with water to get them started and place them in a south-facing window. Keep the mix moistened daily if needed. It is best to water from the bottom, so I put holes in the bottom of my containers and place them in another container with water for 10 minutes to water them. This will reduce the chance of rotting before they are ready.

They will be ready to harvest in 10-14 days. You harvest them by cutting them with a pair of scissors. Wash them and they are ready to eat. Easy as that!

Microgreens cannot be grown again after they are cut, so start with new seeds to produce another crop.

For more information about growing microgreens, go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs1164>. There will be a class on Growing Cool Season Vegetables, including microgreens, on Oct 6 from 6-7pm at UF/IFAS Extension Alachua County, 2800 NE 39 Ave, Gainesville. The cost is \$5. Register for the class at <http://tinyurl.com/z8e4hyd> or 352-955-2402. A demonstration on how to grow microgreens, as well as a packet of seeds to each participant will be provided.