

# Garden Club Questions

As of March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025

## Garden Set-up

- How do you determine the ideal **temperature** for your indoor garden?
  - Typically, the seeds packets will indicate the ideal temperature for the plants. Because we are growing indoors, whatever temperature you set your house is generally a good temperature for the garden. Plants, in general, like warmer temperatures and humidity. (I think the seed packets recommend between 60-80 degrees.)
- If you have a **radiator** with an ornamental cover, could you have the garden on top?
  - It's a good rule of thumb to keep plants away from the radiator since the heat and dryness may affect them. A common suggestion is to keep your garden on a kitchen counter or shelf.
- What is the best type of **water** to use?
  - The best type of water to use is distilled water, but tap water works well. Water to stay away from would be well water (as well as some mineral or spring water), as this sometimes contains things like magnesium that can affect the nutrients we add.
  - Can you use **soft water** for this kit? Is soft water okay to use for plants?
    - Based on our understanding, it should be okay to use! The only consistent warning is not to use well water.
  - Does the **chlorine** in tap water damage the plant growth?
    - If you know you have a high concentration of a specific mineral or chemical, you may want to leave your tap water out for a day before using it in the garden.
- **How many plants** will the planter hold?
  - The garden has 13 slots, but we recommend doing about 8 plants/pods at once, and spacing them evenly across the tray, so the plants do not get crowded.

- **How many seeds** do you typically put in each of the pods?
  - As a rule of thumb, about 3 or 4 seeds, anticipating just 1 or 2 will sprout. If more than 1 seed sprouts, remove all other sprouts, leaving only 1 in each pod. You can re-plant the removed sprouts in soil!
- Do seeds need to be **scarred, cut, or marked**?
  - No – the seeds in this kit do not need additional steps, just the pre-soak described in the planting video!
- Can we start seeds in the hydroponic garden and then **transplant them to pots**?
  - Yes! The pods are made of peat, so you can take them out of the garden and transplant them into soil. You want to transfer them into really saturated, watery soil, and keep the soil watery for about the first week, to give the plants a transition between all-water and all-soil environment.
- How many hours per day should we leave the **light** on?
  - The light will automatically be on a rotation of 16 hours on, 8 hours off. Once you turn on the power, vegetable light, and water pump, you won't have to turn them off again! We recommend that when you first turn it on, you turn it on in the morning, so the light doesn't stay on at night and bother you, but this isn't absolutely necessary.
- Do you need to wait for the seeds to sprout before adding **nutrients**?
  - You will add nutrients when you set up your garden, before the plants sprout. You will also want to add more nutrients every time you replace or add more water to the garden. For every 1L of water you add, add 5mL of each nutrient (Plant Food A and Plant Food B).

## Plants

- Can we use **regular seeds** or does this type of garden need a different type of seed?
  - Yes! You can use any regular seeds.
  - Some plants won't grow well in the hydroponic garden. For example, root vegetables like potatoes or carrots, or woody vegetables and

herbs, like rosemary will not grow very well. Some plants may need more space.

- Large ornamental flowers may not bloom well, but smaller flowers on herbs (like chamomile and lavender) do very well in hydroponic gardens.
- Can you grow **tomatoes**?
  - Yes, you may be able to grow dwarf cherry tomato plants, but they need room, so they may need to be the only thing you grow in your garden at that time. Pruning will need to be a priority to make sure the plant is small enough to stay under the grow light.
- Can you grow from seeds of **green vegetables like cucumbers and peppers**?
  - These are small gardens, so you don't want plants that grow really large. Cucumbers need a lot of space, but small peppers may grow well. We'll discuss this more in our Kitchen Scrap Gardening series!
- Can we grow parsley, cilantro, and other **herbs**?
  - Yes, leafy herbs such as parsley and cilantro will work well in our gardens. Woody herbs like rosemary would not grow well, but the leafy herbs will.
- Can we grow **garlic**?
  - No, root vegetables and things like garlic or onions don't work well growing in the pod environment. The same goes for woody herbs like rosemary.
- Can we grow **wildflowers**?
  - You can try, especially small flowers like chamomile may work well! Many flowers require more "breathing space," though, so you want to make sure they are well-spaced (for example, Ruthe had two chamomile plants on opposite ends of the garden, and nothing in between them.
- Would we be able to plant **perennial flowers** as well as annuals?
  - You can use the hydroponic garden as a starter and then transfer them into soil! You can't grow anything with a bulb in a hydroponic garden,

but you can definitely start other flowers in your hydroponic garden, and transfer them to soil when they get larger.

## Garden Maintenance and Troubleshooting

- The instructions advise cleaning the water reservoir every few weeks, with a **complete water change**. Is it safe to lay the rooted seedlings aside on a counter while this is done?
  - You can pick the tray up and place the entire tray on a cookie tray or Tupperware, so the pods stay upright. The pods help protect the seeds/sprouts while they are out of the basin, they will be fine out of the water while you clean the basin. We also will have our instructional video on how to clean the gardens available on our Resource Page.
- Does the light automatically reset itself if there is a **power outage**?
  - No, you'll just have to turn the light on again to restart the 16 hours on, 8 hours off cycle (you'll also have to turn it on again whenever you unplug the garden to clean).
- The **spinach seeds** included in our kit **didn't grow**. They seem to have gotten moldy. What might have gone wrong, and how can I fix it?
  - Sometimes some seeds don't grow, due to age or having a bad batch of seeds. Spinach can be particularly temperamental. Spinach usually takes 2 weeks to sprout, but it may take 3-4 weeks. If you see mold show up, remove the seeds and the pod, so the mold won't get to the other plants.
- I used 4 seeds per pod as directed, but only 30% of the pods germinated. Can I **reseed the empty pods**?
  - If the pods are free of mold, feel free to plant new seeds in them! If they have mold, don't reuse them.
- Is **mold** a concern in these gardens?
  - The plant food helps fight against mold. Also, placing your stickers on the pods (as detailed in the instructions) and black caps over the empty holes helps prevent mold.
- What is the best way to monitor **pH levels**?

- Using the correct amount of the included nutrients will help balance pH. There is a video about adding nutrients available on our Resource Page.
- What can I do to keep the **gnats, baby flies or ants** away?
  - The hydroponic garden helps prevent a lot of the pests that normally are attracted to moist soil. The oxygen in the water, as well as the lack of soil, should naturally keep these bugs from being attracted to the garden.
- **How long** will these plants continue to grow in the hydroponic garden?
  - When your leafy greens become less full and take up less space, you'll know that you might be reaching the end of their life span, and it would be a good idea to take out those plants. You will get a few months of growth out of your leafy greens, and a bit longer out of your herbs, as they do not grow “out” as much.
  - Keep in mind that you should be keeping your plants at a similar height, so they can all receive the correct amount of light as you adjust the height of the light. So, if you take out some plants but have other tall ones, you might want to wait to regrow them.

### **Additional Supplies**

- Where do you get **pods** for seeds?
  - The pods come with the garden kit! You can purchase additional ones if you need them later here: <https://a.co/d/eliK2uS>. We have more replacement supplies linked in our general FAQ document on the Resource Page.
- Where do we get **additional seeds**?
  - Our suggested sources for seeds are: <https://www.seedneeds.com/> or <https://survivalgardenseeds.com/> or <https://www.gethsemanegardens.com>
  - Here's a link to the Chicago Public Library seed libraries, with a list of branches that have them available! [Seed Libraries at Select Chicago Public Library Branches | Chicago Public Library](#)
- Does the **plant food** expire?

- It is good for about five months after it is opened – if you're using it right away, you'll use it up before it expires.

## Preserving and Using Your Harvest

- Have you ever used a **gas oven to dry herbs** overnight, after it has been heated?
  - Heat helps break down the oils that are in the plant, so you want to be careful to not cook the plant, as you'll lose some of the health benefits in the natural oils. You can use the oven, but the best way to dry our herbs and preserve those natural oils is natural air drying.
- When **pruning** and using our herbs and leafy greens, should we use a knife, scissors, or our hands?
  - You can use scissors, pruning shears, or pinching to harvest or prune the plants. When you use a knife, the cut becomes messier than using a supply that pinches the material, so the pinching action is important.
  - When you're used dried herbs, keep the plant cutting whole for as long as possible to preserve the oils. When you're ready to cook with them, you can chop up the plants, but crunching to break up the herbs releases more of those oils and fragrances.
- Should you **wash your plants** before using them?
  - It's a great idea to rinse those herbs and leafy greens before using them or storing them in the fridge, as dust can collect on indoor gardens. Cold water can work well to help your harvested plants perk up if they are beginning to wilt.