

Garden Club Questions

As of April 9th, 2025

Garden Set-up

- How do you determine the ideal **temperature** for your indoor garden?
 - Typically, the seed packets will indicate the ideal temperature for the plants. Because we are growing indoors, whatever temperature you set your house to 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.
- Is it ok to fill every slot if we are going to **transplant** these outside later?
 - Yes! If you are using your hydroponic garden to sprout seeds for an outdoor garden, you can plant 13 pods in your hydroponic garden and transplant the extra sprouts to very moist soil once they have sprouted.
- 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).
- Will it be a problem if I don't have **the center punch from my stickers**? They got lost (thrown out) during the 4 hours soaking my seeds. I covered with the rest of the sticker. Should I put something over the center hole in the sticker?
 - If the center dot does come off, that is okay. You can place a small sticker or piece of paper partially over the open center dot, or you can leave it open. The rest of the sticker should offer enough protection for the seeds as they sprout.
- I tried to **register my garden kit**, but an order number was required. Is there an order number I should use to register it?
 - We're discussing this with our garden supplier now! Since we place bulk orders, we're determining how we can handle this. If you send us an email at kits@mather.com, we'll get back to you when we know more. Registering your kit is not required, but we know some participants may want to do so!

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 over the pods (as detailed in the instructions) and black caps over the empty holes helps prevent mold.
- Should I be concerned if I see something that looks like **mold** at the bottom of my seedlings? Does this mean they are too damp and if so, is there a way to control this?
 - That is the seed "jump-starting" - you may see a little film while the seeds are soaking. That is totally fine!
- 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.
- Can you clean and **re-use the seed pods** or do you need buy more pods and start fresh with new seeds?
 - When you want to plant new seeds, you’ll need to use a new pod. Links to buy replacement materials can be found on our general FAQ Sheet on our Resource Page.
- Is there any **noise** within the water container? I plugged the cord in correctly on the outside but there's no noise.
 - The water pump in our garden is very quiet, but it is still working, even if you can't hear it.
- I’ve had seeds for years – **do they expire?**
 - Seeds do not expire, but they do lose potency. We recommend soaking it in a little water for a few hours (or up to 2 days). If it sprouts, it is still good! If it doesn’t sprout in that time, it is likely “expired.”
- I have to go **out of town** for three weeks. Is there a way to keep the hydroponic garden going, other than giving it to a neighbor?
 - If you are going out of town at the beginning of your growing process, that is totally fine. The seeds will be slow to germinate and sprout, and won’t use too much water during those three weeks, so you won’t have to worry too much about adding more water while you are away. If you are going out of town for multiple weeks later in the growing/pruning/harvesting process, you may need someone to check on your garden once during your trip, to make sure there is enough water in the basin and enough space between the plants and the light.

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 using 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.

Mint

- What is the difference between mint and peppermint?
 - Peppermint is one of the specific plants under the umbrella of mint in general – it is just one specific type of mint, which we have included in our kits.
- Can you explain how to dry mint without it molding?
 - When you prune your plant, you can dry them by hanging them upside down, covered with a brown paper bag to prevent dust or dirt from gathering while it is drying. You want to let the mint dry until the stems or leaves break when bent before storing them in an airtight container. If any moisture remains when they are moved to the container, that is what can cause mold.

- You can also use a dehydrator or oven, but you'll lose some of the health benefits in the natural oils. The best way to dry our herbs and preserve those natural oils is natural air drying.
- After the mint plant develops in the kit, is it ideal to replant a whole one outside where the mosquitos linger?
 - Yes! If multiple seeds sprout, you can transplant one sprout outside. Once your mint plant starts to grow in your hydroponic garden, you can also transplant some of the mint to a cup of water, let it grow there, and transplant it to soil. We recommend keeping it in soil in a pot even outdoors, since it spreads aggressively if planted in the ground.
- Is mint safe around pets?
 - Mint is a strong plant – the leaves and oils shouldn't be consumed by small children or pets.
- Will mint spread in our hydroponic garden (like it does invasively when planted in the ground)?
 - It is contained in the small space of the pod, though root "shooters" will escape from the pod – you can cut those back!