ZEPHYRA GROVE

The Windowsill Harvest

A beginner's guide to growing real food in a small apartment, with no yard and no green thumb.

FREE STARTER GUIDE | 7 PAGES



Start with light, not plants

Almost every dead plant in a small apartment comes down to light. Care helps, but it cannot replace light, so test your spots before you buy anything.

The 30-second shadow test

Go to your window around midday. Hold your open hand about 30 cm (1 ft) above the surface where a pot would sit and look at the shadow.



Sharp, dark shadow

Bright direct light

Often 6+ hours of sun. Best for dwarf tomatoes, peppers, basil.

Soft, blurry shadow

Medium light

Good for lettuce, mint, green onions, microgreens, parsley.

Faint shadow

Low light

Add a grow light, or use only for shade-tolerant leaves.

No good window? A grow light fixes it.

A full-spectrum LED grow light on a cheap timer works for herbs and leafy greens. Run it about 12 to 16 hours a day and follow the maker's guidance on distance (often 15 to 30 cm above the leaves for small panels).

Windows and direction

In the northern hemisphere a south-facing window is brightest, then west or east. Near the equator, look for the window with the most hours of open sky and keep leaves clear of hot glass at midday.

Your first six plants

Start with fast, forgiving crops so you get early wins. Timelines are typical and shift with light and temperature.

Plant	Light	First harvest	Tip
Microgreens (radish, pea, sunflower)	Medium	7 to 14 days	Shallow tray, mist daily, cover until sprouted.
Green onions (regrown from scraps)	Medium	New growth in about a week	Root ends in water, refresh it every day or two.
Leaf lettuce	Medium	4 to 6 weeks	Cut outer leaves and let the centre keep growing.
Basil	Bright	4 to 6 weeks	Pinch above a leaf pair. Remove flower buds early.
Mint	Medium	6 to 8 weeks	Give it its own pot because it spreads fast.
Dwarf cherry tomato	Bright or grow light	10 to 14 weeks	Needs strong light and a pot of 8 to 10 litres or more.

Pick two, not six

Beginners fail by buying everything at once. Start with microgreens plus one of basil or lettuce. Add more only after two weeks of easy wins.

Why microgreens first

They need no deep pot, finish in about two weeks and show you right away whether your watering and light are working.

Pots, soil and watering

Set up once, properly

- Drainage holes are non-negotiable. A pot with no hole is a bucket, and roots rot in standing water.
- Use fresh potting mix, never soil dug from a garden. It stays loose and drains well in containers.
- Match pot to plant: herbs and lettuce like 15 to 20 cm (6 to 8 in) pots, tomatoes need much more.
- Put a saucer under each pot and empty it after watering.
- Go vertical: a shelf or rail by the window gives you more growing area on the same floor space.

Watering without guessing

The finger test: push a finger about 2.5 cm (1 in) into the soil. Dry means water. Damp means wait. Water slowly until it runs out of the bottom, then empty the saucer.

Sign	What you see	Fix
Too much water	Yellow lower leaves, mushy stems, soil that never dries, tiny gnats.	Let the top layer dry, check drainage, water less often.
Too little water	Crispy edges, drooping that perks up after watering, very light pot.	Water deeply and more regularly, avoid hot afternoon sun.

Rule of thumb

Most beginners overwater, not underwater. When unsure, check the soil before you pour.

Your 5-minute routine

A small garden does not need hours. Once it is set up, a quick daily look and one weekly reset keep it healthy.

Daily (about 5 min)

- [ ] Finger-test the soil and water if dry
- [ ] Harvest or pinch what is ready
- [ ] Glance under leaves for pests
- [ ] Check the grow light timer

Weekly reset

- [ ] Turn each pot a quarter turn
- [ ] Wipe leaves and trim yellow ones
- [ ] Empty saucers, refresh water for scraps
- [ ] Sow one new tray of microgreens

Your first 30 days

When	What to do
Week 1	Do the light test. Buy pots, potting mix and seeds. Sow microgreens and start green onions.
Week 2	Harvest first microgreens. Sow lettuce and basil. Settle into the daily check.
Week 3	Thin crowded seedlings. Keep watering steady. Sow your second microgreen tray.
Week 4	First light harvest of lettuce and basil. Decide whether you have the light for tomatoes.

Fix it fast

Most problems have a simple cause. Match what you see, then change one thing at a time.

What you see	Likely cause	What to try
Long, stretched, pale stems	Not enough light	Move closer to the window or add a grow light.
Yellow lower leaves	Overwatering or poor drainage	Let the top 2.5 cm dry out. Make sure water can escape.
Brown, crispy edges	Underwatering, hot glass or dry air	Water deeply, move back from midday glass.
Tiny flying gnats	Constantly wet topsoil	Let soil dry between waterings. Use yellow sticky traps.
White powder on leaves	Powdery mildew, low airflow	Space plants out, remove affected leaves, add gentle airflow.
Very slow growth	Low light, cold, or root-bound pot	Check light first, then temperature, then pot size.
Basil going woody or bolting	Flowering has started	Pinch off flower buds and harvest regularly.

Change one thing at a time

If you move the pot, change the watering and add fertiliser all in one day, you will never know what worked.

Ready to go further?

This free guide gets you started. If you want a complete step-by-step system with layouts, crop choices and a planting calendar, one option is The 5-Minute Garden, a digital guide from an independent seller.

What the seller's page says it includes

- Layout diagrams for fitting more plants into a small footprint
- A list of crops chosen for the most savings versus store prices
- A daily checklist and a problem-solving section with photos
- A 12-month planting calendar and apartment-specific techniques
- Bonus guides on container gardening, raised beds and beginner hydroponics

Good to know before you buy
It is a digital PDF from a third-party seller, not a physical book. Price, bonuses and refund terms can change, so read the seller's page. Results depend on your light, climate and effort, and are not guaranteed.

See The 5-Minute Garden

betterdailyguide.site/ds24/5-minute-garden

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