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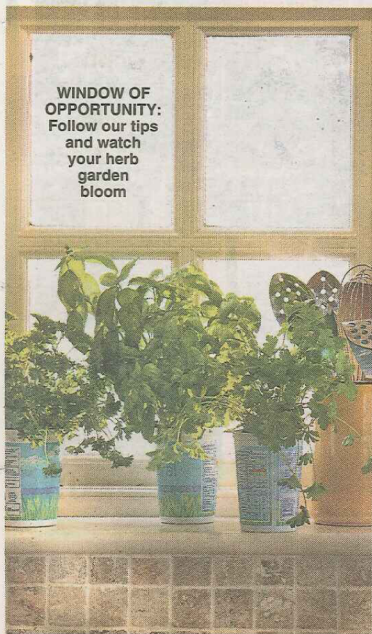
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Thyme for some sage advice

Horticulturalist **MARTIN FIDDES** explains how to grow herbs successfully in the kitchen

WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY:
Follow our tips and watch your herb garden bloom



LOOK around any kitchen and you'll see the same nailed-on certainties: oven, dishwasher, fridge freezer and straggly old herb plant on its last legs.

Yes, it seems that our green-fingered nation remains strangely unable to keep these delicious plants alive indoors. It's a shame because not only will a thriving kitchen herb garden liven up your dishes but it will provide exceptional health benefits. So is it really that difficult? Not if you follow a few basic rules.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Lush, leaf-laden plants need the correct conditions to grow. Basil, which originates from tropical Asia, will hate a cold greenhouse or shaded

windowsill, while the evergreen and wonderfully fragrant rosemary will put up with more or less everything but needs regular pruning.

START SLOWLY

Trying to grow a full-scale herb garden in your kitchen might be a step too far to start with, so start small and try to raise just one of two plants and increase productivity as your confidence grows.

All herb plants need some maintenance to keep them in fine fettle: pinch the tops out of basil to keep the leaves coming, keep coriander

moist to prevent bolting (premature flowering) and prune rosemary to prevent woody sprigs.

HELPING HANDS

Investing in a propagator or self-watering pots will help get your kitchen herb farm up and running. Without the help of a propagator, sun-loving tender annuals such as basil can only really be grown from seed from mid to late spring on a windowsill and this drastically reduces your cooking options. The heat produced by an electric propagator, or even



just a basic seed tray and propagator lid, can extend your growing season and with versions available which water your seedlings too the list of excuses for that limp, last-gasp specimen will get a lot shorter.

SEE THE LIGHT

The biggest obstacle for early-sown plants is the lack of quality sunlight early in the year. A self-contained grow light garden kit for kitchen use will not only look good but will give seedlings the hit of summer daylight they crave. If you want to go into growing in a bigger way and you have a greenhouse, shed or propagating area a full-blown grow light kit is the answer.

INFORMATION:

www.harrodhorticultural.com

A quick guide for the best results

- Choose seed sowing compost and let it warm up in a garage, shed or greenhouse slightly before you use it.

- Fill your seed trays or pots and firm the compost before sowing the seeds

- the more soil the seed has contact with, the better.

- Water the soil gently from above or better still, stand your trays or pots in water to allow the soil to take up water from beneath.

- Sow your seeds and cover them with a layer of fine compost or vermiculite.

- Place your pots or trays on a sunny windowsill, a propagator or under a grow light. Cover with a propagator lid or

- clear polythene to help create damp, warm and humid conditions.

- Stay alert and don't let the soil dry out.

- Once the seedlings have emerged and you can see their leaves, remove the propagator

- lid or polythene to give them maximum light.

- When seedlings are large enough to handle, transplant them into bigger pots.

- Keep the seedlings well watered and in a sunny spot.