



Latest features

The future of grow-your-own

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New kits and machines offer the grow-your-own experience to busy urbanites, but are they any good? Charlie Cottrell tests her green fingers

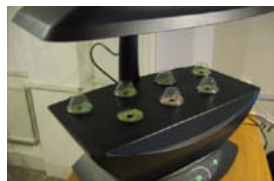
Green intentions

I'm all for the grow-your-own movement, but I'm a flat-dwelling, long-hours-working, gal about town. The reality is, I'm going nowhere near a trowel.

Keen to go green, though, I'm up for alternatives to tilling the soil. It appears I'm not alone. A quick search on the high street and the trusty web turns up an array of quirky, space-saving options for urbanites after a taste of home grown goodness.

The Egging is a cute and biologically baffling creation. It looks like an egg but crack it open, add water and in a few weeks you've got yourself a tiny herb garden.

Up the same alley, Pocket Gardens are a series of rather chic, mini grow-bags. Small, silver pouches contain a variety of herbs to grow-at-home, including a fancy lemongrass option, good for Thai cooking.



The AeroGarden

Aero - dynamic

While these products hit it in the style stakes, function-wise, they're not so different from the classic seed-in-a-pot combo that's done alright for generations. Step up the [AeroGarden](#) - a hydroponic greenhouse-without-glass that looks like something nicked from the Starship Enterprise and promises 'pleasurable and successful year round gardening'.

It fits together like a kinder-egg toy. Pop in a couple of megawatt bulbs, fill with water and plug in. That's it. If I had nails, I wouldn't have to worry about breaking them. It's the cleanest bit of gardening I've ever done. My starter kit comes with seven herb pods that slot into pre-determined holes, now all I have to do is set the timer, sit back and see how my garden grows.



Egging - hatched

Herbs in the spotlight

For the first few days, apart from a blinding light that clicks on late afternoon and runs for eight hours before conveniently switching itself off there's not much action, but as the weeks tick by, the AeroGarden action gets really exciting. The herbs grow so quickly that within a month I've had my first harvest.

I go herb crazy - perking up salads and sauces with cuttings from my plants. My home grown mint goes into everything: Pimm's, a jaw-droppingly good dish of [pasta, asparagus, mint pesto and poached egg](#) and my favourite, a [broad bean, mint and pancetta salad](#).

Fronds of dill go into a quick Saturday lunch of [baked salmon and potatoes](#) and purple basil, which I'd never before heard of, dazzled in Jamie Oliver's [sexiest salad in the world](#).



Dill-ightful

Growing is good for you

All of a sudden I understand why allotmenters are so smug. I feel so right-on with my luscious herb-garden and daily dose of greens, and all I have to do for this worthy pleasure is keep the water level topped up and, once a fortnight, drop in a couple of nutrient tablets. I can leave it for weekends and come back on Monday to a still blossoming bouquet. My fridge no longer contains wilting packets of coriander and my window ledges are free of pots of basil and parsley, bought with good intentions but inevitably left to die, parched and forgotten.

Is this the future of gardenless gardening? Could be. It doesn't come cheap though. A starter kit with the machine, nutrients and herbs will set you back £119.95. That's considerably more than a couple of packets of seeds and a bag of compost but if you get your herbs from a supermarket and get through a couple of bags a week it works out cheaper. As for the gardening experience, surprisingly, I missed being hands-on. The machine was so self-sufficient that come harvest time I felt like I was feasting without paying my dues to the growing community. Picking herbs from a programmable robo-garden was cool but I didn't feel like I'd earned any green-fingered kudos. That said, I still haven't signed up for an allotment.



Bean cuisine

Find out how [guerilla growers](#) reclaim urban land (illegally, if needed) to go green.

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