



give it a **GO**

Dirt free data

PART 1

Consumer editor, **Julia Heaton**, takes to the water as she explores a way of growing herbs without soil in the first of a two part report

IT WAS while flicking through an in-flight magazine during a trip across Texas that I first came across the AeroGarden. Amongst all the weird and wacky gear the Americans do best, this system for growing fruit and veg hydroponically (i.e. using water, nutrients and lights rather than sun and soil) really made me wonder why it wasn't yet available to us Brits. So I was delighted when it finally launched on these shores and couldn't

bio domes provided, dropped nutrient tablets (also included) into the water, fired up the lights and waited for action... The great thing about this system is that it's designed to do all the hard work for you. Warning lights on the bowl flash when you need to add more nutrients or top up the water. However there were times when I felt that the latter was running terribly low and added more myself. Was it a coincidence that both water and nutrient warning lights flashed at the

“Our little AeroGarden soon felt like a member of the family”

wait to get the starter kit up and running in my kitchen. This was pretty easy to do thanks to the excellent instructions. I just needed to fit the extendable lamp arm to the base, pop the lamp hood on top (having inserted its two grow bulbs) and link top and bottom with the electric cord provided. The growing bowl, which holds 6½ pints (3.2 ltrs) of water, fitted comfortably onto the base and I turned my attention to the growing kit. This consists of seven seed pods which sit in the same number of openings on the growing surface of the bowl. I plumped for the gourmet herbs kit consisting of coriander, Italian basil, purple basil, parsley, mint, chives and dill. I covered each pod with the plastic

same time I wondered? You can set the grow lights to turn on and off at whatever times are convenient. The built-in timer should ensure that they stay on for about 16 hours and shut off for eight, which the makers claim costs just £1.60 a month. But it seemed to have a life of its own, turning on and off at the strangest hours.

Root system
At one point I was ready to give up until, for some inexplicable reason, it all settled down.

Very strange! Anyway, as water and nutrients fed an ever-expanding root system from below, the seeds began to sprout in a matter of days. Once a tiny plant appeared on the top of each pod I was able to remove the bio dome and let the plant get on with things. As they grew all I needed to do was raise the lamp hood up a notch every so often to keep the plants a safe distance from the lights. I have to admit that our little



After taking delivery the system was easy to set up

AeroGarden soon felt like a member of the family. It was fascinating to get up each morning and see what had happened overnight. I can well understand why gardeners end up talking to their plants.

Imagine my horror then when things took a turn for the worst. First my purple sprouting basil died and the other plants looked like they weren't far behind. Was there a water borne virus on the loose? Perhaps night time temperatures dropped too low. Thermometer at the ready I could only watch and wait. I'll report back with full results in a few weeks time.



It all went well (right) then plants got sick and the purple basil died (above)

this week... **AeroGarden**

SCORE SO FAR



SUPPLIER: AeroGarden. To order call ©(0845) 170 7555 aerogarden.org.uk

PRICE: £107.95 (p&p included)

PROS: Easy assembly/ warning lights/ simple to use/ fascinating to watch

CONS: Lights could switch on at odd times/ one plant died