Garden Club Questions (FAQ)

Updated November 11, 2026

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. (We 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 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.
    - Can you use water from a **dehumidifier** in your garden?
        - Water from a dehumidifier can be used for non-edible plants, but it isn't recommended for plants you intend to eat, as dehumidifiers can build up bacteria and mold in the stationary water.
    - What about **rainwater**?
        - Based on our understanding, rainwater should work well! Just be sure it does not have any debris in it.
- When should I set up my hydroponic garden? Does the **season** matter?
    - The great thing about indoor hydroponic gardening is that you can do it year-round! You can set up your garden at any time.

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- **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!
- Do all seeds need to be **soaked** first?
    - They don't have to be, but it does speed up the germination process for all of our seeds!
- In another program, I was taught to soak seeds for 8-12 hours and then put them in the fridge on paper towels for 3 weeks before planting. Would this work with the hydroponic garden too?
    - Yes, this could work! We suggest soaking seeds for *at least* 4-6 hours, so longer soaking does even better! 3 weeks might be a little long to keep it in the fridge – you would need to check for mold over that much time.
- 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, allowing the plant some dark/rest time.
- 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 the hole 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.
    - If the sprout grows a little crooked and has trouble poking through the center hole of the sticker, you can remove the sticker to let the sprout continue to grow.
- I tried to **register my garden kit**, but an order number was required. Is there an order number I should use to register it?
    - All Mather kits are automatically under warranty! If you are missing any supplies, or have maintenance issues with your garden, you can contact RainPoint at support@rainpointonline.com for support. Be sure to let them know that you received your kit from Mather!
- In the various manuals and handouts, there are conflicting instructions on when to **remove the plastic domes**: when it touches dome, or when it first shows signs of geminating. When I left it longer after germination, I noticed transpiration happening - good or bad?
    - The dome traps humidity, which the seeds need when they're young and germinating. You want to remove the dome right before the plant touches the dome. A little transpiration (condensation/humidity inside the dome) is expected and good, as it shows the humidity building up.
- When planting, what is the **best combination of each plant** to use? Which plants are beneficial to grow side by side?
    - Basil and mint will produce a large harvest for a long period of time, so planting just one of each is good. Dandelions, arugula, and spinach produce more slowly, and you often use more at once, so you may want to plant multiple of each of those. You can also just grow more of what you like best!
    - Inside our hydroponic gardens, there is no particular benefit to arranging certain plants next to others. Just be sure to give the plants room to grow, so don't fill every slot in the garden!
- Where is the best **location** in the home for the garden?
    - There are a few main factors to keep in mind:
        - It needs to always be plugged in, so it needs to be near an outlet.
        - It needs space to grow in height, up to about 1.5 feet.
        - It should be in a place where it won't be getting bumped frequently.
        - It can be nice to have it close to the kitchen for harvesting and adding water, but not necessary!
    - You may want to move the garden away from windows in the winter, if possible, to maintain a more comfortable temperature for the plants.

- Can the garden kit be placed on a kitchen counter above a **dishwasher**, or will the vibrations from the dishwasher prevent the seeds from growing?
    - If it's just an average dishwasher, and you're using it a normal amount, it probably shouldn't be a cause for concern. The dishwasher-produced humidity might even be nice for the plants! We would only worry if it was vibrating enough that water was sloshing out of the hydroponic garden.
- Where should I store the **leftover seeds**?
    - Cool temperatures slow the growing process, so any cool, dark place will work! You might use a specific drawer or shelf in your fridge.
    - Store them in the paper envelopes they came in, or other paper or wax paper. Don't seal them up in plastic.
- When you add water to your hydroponic garden water basin, **can you soak your pods in the basin**, or do you have to do it separately?
    - You can soak the pods in that container – you'll still want to fully submerge them and soak them, but you can do that in the water basin. Some debris may be left from the pods, so you would want to clear out any debris that was left in the water basin from the pods before planting your seeds.

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.
    - Do the **tomato** plants need a stake to support the plant?
        - While they may not need a stake in the hydroponic garden, if you decide to transplant them to a pot, they will need a cage or stakes as they grow.
- 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.
- Can we grow **garlic**?
    - No, root vegetables and things like garlic or onions don't work well growing in the pod environment.
- 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).
- Recommendations for **edible flowers**?
    - Chamomile and lavender are some of our favorites!
- 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.
- Can I grow **jasmine** in my hydroponics garden and transplant it to a flowerpot to live as a house plant?
    - Jasmine may work in the hydroponic system, but we don't have experience trying it. Keep the purpose of the system and the amount of available space in mind when planting new plants!
- Can **radishes or peas** grow in my hydroponic garden?
    - Radishes are a root vegetable, so they won't grow well in our hydroponic gardens. Peas could work in the garden, but keep in mind that peas often need lots of space to grow. If you would like to grow peas, it may be best to start them in the hydroponic garden, and then transplant them into a pot or the ground when they grow too big.
- Can you grow **catnip**?
    - Yes! But it tends to grow outwards, so you might not be able to grow many things next to it.
- Can **vegetables and flowers** be grown at the same time?
    - Yes, you can grow both at the same time! You can keep it on the vegetable light setting (full-spectrum light).

- How can I do **rotational planting of lettuce** in the hydroponic garden? Is it different from doing so in soil?
    - Approach it similarly to how you would in a soil garden, but keep in mind that, with the nutrients, hydroponic gardens will be more consistently the same, and your lettuce will likely grow fast. Track the progress in a garden journal so you can plan for future cycles better once you have experienced one or two complete cycles, from planting to going to seed.
- For herbs like **cilantro**, how many plants per pod? One seed is one stem, and one stem of cilantro doesn't really do much!
    - For herbs like cilantro, you should be able to grow 2-3 plants, and prune carefully so the plants don't suffocate each other. More than 2-3 would probably be too many.
- My **arugula tastes peppery**—is that normal? What can I pair it with to balance the flavor?
    - Yes, this is normal! When your arugula is peppery, you can pair it with things you would normally add pepper to. Try experimenting with different meats, cheeses, fruit, and nuts.
- Is this hydroponic garden considered **organic**?
    - The seeds we send are organic seeds. We've reached out to RainPoint, the company we work with to source our kits, to determine if the nutrients are organic, and don't have a firm answer. Likely, if it's not labeled organic, it hasn't been certified organic. However, we can say that these are good-quality nutrients for hydroponic gardening, containing added nutrients that the plants need.
- I tried a variety of **squashes** in the hydroponic for transplant. None started. Were they too big for the cones?
    - While this type of root vegetable won't do well in its full growing cycle in the hydroponic garden, you may be able to start the seeds there. Even if a plant typically sprouts fast, the seeds or hydroponic environment might change that pacing. After 3-4 weeks of no sprouting, you probably want to clean out that seed and restart.
- With **edible flowers**, is the entire flower edible, or just the petals?
    - For chamomile, nasturtiums, pansies, lavender, borage, and violas, you can eat the whole bloom. For calendula, you just want the petals.
- Can you **harvest your own seeds** and plant them in your hydroponic garden?
    - You can definitely try this! With store-bought produce, because of the way they were grown, you may get less flavor with your regrown plants.

- Can you grow **fruit trees** (like lemon or lime trees, or shrubberies for strawberries) in the hydroponic garden?
    - If the seed is small enough to fit in the seed pods, you can use the hydroponic garden to start the seeds! You won't be able to grow a full tree or shrub within the hydroponic garden, though – you'll need to transfer it to soil.
- Do you have tips for regrowing **avocados**?
    - Avocados do actually grow in water, so you can set the avocado pit in water (suspended with toothpicks or plastic wrap) and watch it grow roots and then transplant to soil. This process wouldn't work in this hydroponic garden, as the avocado pit is too big. You can definitely regrow an avocado, but it will take several years for the tree to grow.
- Are there certain **plants that don't do well together** in the same indoor garden?
    - Some plants need a lot of space to grow – you may want to only plant one or two plants (like chamomile or dwarf cherry tomatoes) in your hydroponic garden at a time to give each plant enough space.

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 up the tray 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, and they will be fine out of the water while you clean the basin. We also have an instructional video on how to clean the gardens available on our Resource Page.
- Does a hydroponic garden **require power** to work properly?
    - Yes! The hydroponic garden requires power to run the plant light and water pump.
- 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 it.
- What are some general guidelines for how and when to **prune**?
    - See the pruning handout included in the kit (and on the online Resource Page).
    - A general rule of thumb is to prune leafy greens once they reach the size of a bunch of leafy greens in a grocery store.

    - For herbs like basil or mint, you can start pruning them once you start seeing multiple nodes (places on the main stem where leaves are growing out) – prune these nodes from the top, and make sure to always leave at least one node when pruning! You'll also always want to harvest the largest leaves, wherever they are on the plant. You can just leave the nodes, and those nodes will then grow new, smaller leaves.
    - For an herb like thyme that doesn't have nodes, you do want to prune it to encourage it to grow out instead of up.
- 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. We recommend trimming on a diagonal if possible.
- Is there an art to **pinching plants**?
    - Pinching with your fingers is okay, but it may cause a little damage to the plant. Instead, consider using your nails, or a pair of scissors or garden shears.
- 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, or any root growth, 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? Do we need to worry about bugs?
    - 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.
    - If you transplant your sprouts into a pot, it depends on the pests, but many do not like pepper, mint, cinnamon, or other strong smells. You can also try a vinegar and dish soap solution to get rid of fruit flies.
- **How long** will these plants **continue to grow** in the hydroponic garden?
    - When your leafy greens become less full and take up less space, or leaf growth slows, you'll know that they 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.
    - You may also notice your greens getting more "spindly", which will indicate you need to start over again! The taste will also turn a little more bitter – you can even do a quick taste test when harvesting, instead of waiting to notice a taste change when putting your greens in a salad!
    - 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. You can lift the lid slightly to see the water by the pump move to be assured that the water pump is on.
- 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.
- The **water level has not gone down** in over a month. Is something wrong?
    - When the plants are first growing, they will not soak up much water at all, so this is normal! Once the plants are larger and you are pruning them for continued growth, you will notice the water level going down more.
- Is it normal to have **water levels decrease quickly**, by about 1L every 4-5 days?
    - Yes, this can be normal! As the plants get larger, they may take in more water. As long as your plants are looking healthy (and there are no visible water leaks around your garden!), this is just caused by the plants taking in more water at different stages in their life cycles!
- What is the **minimum level of water** needed to keep the plants hydrated?
    - You want the water to be at least touching some part of the seed pods. That is probably about 3L, so that is the minimum, but we recommend keeping 4-5L of water in the basin at all times.
- Can **roots** be **trimmed**?
    - Yes, the roots can handle a little damage, and once you see that the water in your garden is full of roots, you may want to trim the roots or transplant some of your plants and start anew.
    - Will **mold** form on the roots if they're very long?
        - Mold should not form on the roots – you shouldn't need to trim your roots unless they are strangling other plants or getting into the water pump.
    - Can I **replant the trimmed roots** and grow more plants?
        - For successful regrowth, you'll need more than just the roots of the plant.
- Any tips on **tangled roots** and how to disentangle them?
    - If you can still pull up the plant to check on it without an issue, you can let it be. If the roots are really tangled, you can gently massage them apart under running water (with a low water pressure). The seeds we sent were

also for fairly sturdy plants, so some damage to the roots is okay. You don't want to cut roots too much, though!

- My plant **roots** changed from **white to brown**—is that normal?
    - Yes, this is normal. When roots are new, they tend to be white, but as they age, they might get a little darker.
- When the plant **light goes off**, the plant starts to look **wilted**, but it perks up when the light is on. Should I be concerned?
    - This is most likely not a concern! Check that your garden has enough water, but otherwise, this is natural.
- What to do if one of your plants **grows too tall** for the garden?
    - Our hydroponic gardens require consistent pruning to keep the plants at a manageable size. If your plant grows to the height of the light at its tallest setting, it is definitely time to harvest!
- My arugula has 2 types of leaves. Some are smooth, which is what I see in the store, and the others have **little spikes** on them. Are they both edible?
    - Yes, both are edible! If you don't like the look or feel of the spikes, you can discard those. The spikes are just a sign that the plant has been growing for a while.
- There are smaller **leaves** under the plant that are **dying** and some of the bigger leaves are **browning** on the edge. What should I do?
    - It is completely normal for the lower leaves to wilt, as they are receiving less light. This may be a sign to harvest your leaves earlier.
    - If the top leaves are turning brown, make sure there is a 4-inch gap between your top leaves and the light, so the light doesn't burn the leaves. You may also want to trim more leaves off to encourage what is left to grow better.
- I notice that some of the salad **leaves** in my hydroponic system have started to **turn yellowish white**. Is there something that I need to do to stop this on my salad leaves?
    - Check how close your light is to your plants. You want them to be about a hand's width from the light. If they're too close to the light, you'll want to prune your plants. Being too close to the light burns and bleaches the leaves.
- What could be causing **yellow spots** on my leaves?
    - Yellow spots may be caused by the leaves being too close to the light, so you want to make sure there is about a four-inch gap (or hand-width) between the leaves and lamp. It could also be caused by lack of nutrients, so make sure you're adding nutrients on schedule.

- My lettuce, arugula and basil are doing well, but my **spinach is drying out** and not doing well. Any tips?
    - Spinach likes cooler weather, so hotter weather (even indoors) may have affected it. You also want to make sure that all plants are getting a good amount of light by pruning any taller plants back. You might also try cold stratification for the seeds before planting.
- Can you tell us about **cold stratification** for the spinach seeds?
    - Cold stratification involves putting a seed in a cold environment (such as a refrigerator) before planting. One option is to put the seeds in a jar of wet sand in your refrigerator.
    - With the spinach cold germination process, how do you know when they're ready to plant?
        - Typically about two-three weeks would be recommended, but there's no specific cut-off date or visual indicator of when the seeds are ready.
- Are these plants growing as hydroponics **safe for cats**?
    - Among the seeds included with your kit, an excess of consuming mint can potentially be bad for cats.
    - Among other common indoor plants, snake plants (a.k.a. mother-in-law's tongue), lilies, and lavender are particularly bad for cats.
- I use **filtered water** for my garden. When I went to clean the tank, I noticed the water was not scummy. Could this be because of the filtered water?
    - It could be! We have experience using tap water for our gardens, and it is not frequently scummy. The residue we have is typically just a little ring around the side of the garden, caused by the nutrients, which is very easy to clean out! It is still smart to change the water and clean your garden regularly, even if the water looks clean.
- Can plants get **too much light**?
    - Yes, although this isn't too common. This is why we recommend starting the plant light rotation during the morning hours when they will also get indirect light from the sun. Plants need some time to rest in darkness, just like us.
- My hydroponic garden basin has a **white crust** around the edge. How do I remove this, or is it okay?
    - This can happen naturally due to the water and nutrient contents. Usually at the end of the growing season, when you're about to restart, you can scrub that away. You can use a wet paper towel and vinegar for a little extra help to remove that ring. When restarting and cleaning your garden,

you can also use soap and scrub every piece of the garden except for the filter sponge.

- I was cleaning my hydroponic garden and noticed that the **filter** needed **cleaning**. What should I do about that?
    - When cleaning the hydroponic garden, take a look at the filter and remove any roots, and pop out and clean the sponge-like material in the filter. Don't use soap, but either blow through the filter or run clean water through it.
- I had a hard time **removing the filter** when cleaning. How do you get the filter out?
    - The filter is meant to feel secure and even a little difficult to pull out! It may feel stuck, but it isn't. The filter should be grabbed on each side and wiggled a little bit, then pulled forward. When you remove it, it will be a small cup-like piece with a grating, containing a sponge. You will want to clean out the sponge and make sure that any roots are removed. Rinse with cold water, and do not use soap. To put the filter back in, the side with the little notch goes on top – it should slide in fully.
    - The filter doesn't have to be removed until you're cleaning everything out to completely re-start your growing cycle (likely after a few months).
    - Can I unscrew the entire filter to remove and clean the sponge?
        - If it's easier for you to do it this way, you can. Just be sure to screw it back in very tightly! Pulling out the part of the filter that has the sponge in it will likely be easier.
- Can I use **salt, soap, vinegar, and/or a soft toothbrush** to help me clean the ring of residue inside the basin of the garden?
    - Yes, you can use a bit of soap to clean the basin, but make sure the soap does not come into contact with the filter. A soft toothbrush can also be helpful for cleaning. You can also use vinegar or salt to help clean that ring of residue if needed, especially Epsom salt, but be sure to clean thoroughly afterwards to remove all the salt, vinegar, or soap that you use.
- Will my indoor plants be impacted by the current **low air quality** from the Canadian wildfires?
    - One of the great things about growing plants indoors is that they are less impacted by the climate! If you do not feel impacted by the air quality when indoors, your plants likely will not either. We are far from the Canadian wildfires, so your outdoor plants may also remain unaffected, but it is smart to monitor them and take note of any changes that might occur.

- I use **old water** from my hydroponic garden to **water my other plants**, because it has plant food in it. Is this a good idea?
    - While reusing the water from the hydroponic garden is not a bad idea, it offers few additional benefits. The plants in your hydroponic garden take in all that plant food, so the water likely does not contain many extra nutrients by the time you reuse it.
- Why are my spinach **leaves curling**?
    - When leaves curl in on themselves, it could mean a couple of different things. It could mean that they are not getting enough nutrients or light, or that they are getting too much light. Make sure your water level is staying around 5L, you're adding nutrients each time you add water, and your light is about 4 inches above the top of the plants.
- My basil is sprouting but my spinach never sprouted. Is there another **seed** you recommend that would **grow quickly** to catch up to the basil, so I can keep the light at the same height?
    - If your basil is just sprouting, you can easily grow any other plant and keep the light at the same height.
    - If your basil has been growing for up to a month, be sure to keep pruning it above the first node, so it stays small until the new seeds have sprouted. By soaking the seeds before planting them, you'll jumpstart their germination, so they'll be able to catch up quickly.
    - If your basil has grown for over a month and is pretty large, it is best to wait to replant until your current plants have stopped growing and you are starting a new round of growth in your garden.
- My basil plant is **leaking a clear liquid** after trimming a main stem. Should I be concerned?
    - If it leaked for just a moment when you cut it, this should be okay. If the plant is continuously leaking, this is not normal, and it may be best to remove it from the garden as a precautionary measure.
- Does **misting** plants help with hydration?
    - Yes! Misting houseplants is always a good idea. It's not absolutely necessary for hydroponic plants, since they get water from the basin, but it is good, because it mimics rain. If you notice dust or debris on the leaves, you can mist them to clear off the leaves, so they can absorb the light better.
- My plant has begun to **flower**. What do I do?
    - We suggest pinching or cutting the flowers off, which will encourage more growth in the leaves. While you can also eat the flowers of many herbs,

the leaves are where we want the growth concentrated, for flavor and benefits. If the plant is also growing tall and flowering, but growing fewer leaves, it is likely bolting. Try pruning to encourage leaf growth, but it may be time to replant.

- There is something **green growing on the seed pods**. Should I get rid of them, even if a plant is growing in them?
    - The green growth you see is most likely algae. It's not bad to see the algae, but the algae will start taking the nutrients (plant food) away from the plants. If you see algae on the pods, try to scrape it off if you can. If you see the algae in the basin, you will need to clean everything out and replant. One of the main ways to prevent the algae from growing on the pods is to keep the stickers on while the plants grow.
- How can I naturally get rid of **fruit flies**?
    - Vinegar is a really good option! Putting vinegar in a bottle with a small neck, then rolling up a piece of paper to make a funnel that you place inside the bottle neck can capture the flies. They climb into the bottle but can't get back out. You can take it outside to let them out or let them expire.
        - You can also put a small piece or banana or banana peel in the bottom of the trap to attract the flies.
    - Another place where fruit flies lay their eggs is in the sink drain. Regularly cleaning it out with vinegar and baking soda clears the pipes of residue that attracts them.
    - You can buy or forage praying mantis egg cases, and the grown praying mantises will eat the fruit flies.
- I discovered **aphids and thrips** on the plants in my hydroponic garden. How do you get rid of them?
    - Cutting back the plants and potentially isolating them from other plants so the pests don’t spread is the best method.
    - From a participant: I get little aphid type bugs on succulents every so often and dab the bugs off with a Q-tip dipped in 90% isopropyl alcohol.
    - You may enjoy this video from Kitchen Scrap Gardening: https://youtu.be/oD5VFT2dR-Q
- My mint seeds didn’t sprout. Instead, I ended up with these little bitty **bugs** crawling all through the pods. Wiped out everything!
    - Those might have been gnats. Sometimes the water will naturally attract little bugs. You may want to look into mint spray, vinegar, or other bug-

deterrents. If there is one plant that is affected, you may just want to remove that plant before it affects other plants in the garden.

- The **parsley keeps falling over**. What should I do?
    - You can put a small stake (straw, skewer, etc.) in the little holes where you stick the labels, to help support the stems. You may also want to prune the plant if it's growing too fast, so it doesn't weigh the stalk down. You can pinch off the tops of the plant to encourage/force growth on the lower stems and to get the plant to bush out instead of growing one tall stem.
- The **chamomile** seeds are growing well, but do not have any **blooms**.
    - You may need to prune the plant back. The blooms also may just take longer than anticipated.
- My arugula is growing fast. However, because I am pruning, the new **leaves are not full**. What should I do?
    - The best way to prune our leafy greens is to cut one leaf at a time, to leave the smaller leaves to grow larger. Pull them out separately and cut them individually.
- Has anyone successfully grown **cilantro** in the hydroponic garden? I bought a new packet of seeds this year and have tried twice to grow cilantro and the seeds have not germinated.
    - We have had success with cilantro, but it did take some time to germinate -- make sure you're waiting about 4 weeks to see sprouts before you give up and replant!
- The light from my garden doesn't seem to be reaching the pods on the edges or in the corners.
    - Using something reflective or white might help reflect the garden's light to reach all the pods in the garden. You also want to make sure that your plants are a similar height, so taller middle plants don't block shorter outer plants.

Transplanting

- 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.
- If I am **transplanting** my plants to pots, is there a particular type of **soil** I should use?

    - There are different soils specifically for potted plants or vegetables. The most important thing is to transplant into super saturated soil at first, since you are transferring them directly from water. When the soil dries out naturally, you can switch to watering it normally.
- Do you have suggestions on **transplanting** from the hydroponic garden to regular soil? Running into a problem with **roots tangling** up with the plastic basket.
    - Roots naturally tangle up, but all the plants we are working with are hardy, so a little tearing or cutting of the roots when transplanting should be okay.
- Can you **transplant** an outdoor plant (like flowers) **to a hydroponic garden**?
    - This would be more difficult to do, since the outdoor plants are used to soil, as opposed to growing in water. You may be able to take cuttings from existing herbs, like mint or basil, and root those in pods in your hydroponic garden.
- If you have two seedlings growing in one pod, how do you remove just one of them to transplant?
    - You can pluck the seedling when it's very small, so it has space to grow. If they start to grow too much in the same pod, they may become too intertwined to separate. You can always transplant them together, if you choose to! You can also grow your plants from start to finish in your garden.
- Can I use **nutrients** on transplanted plants?
    - The nutrients are specifically for hydroponic gardens -- your transplanted seeds won't need them, as they get those nutrients from soil.
- Do **rockwool** pods transplant into soil like the seed pods that come with our garden?
    - Yes! You can place full rockwool pods into saturated soil to transplant seedlings from a hydroponic system that uses rockwool. Starting with very saturated soil is especially important when your seedling is in a rockwool pod.

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/1VhM281 or https://a.co/d/ici6APP. 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, 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.
- Could I use **aquatic plants chemicals** with hydroponics?
    - Hydroponics typically have their own pre-made nutrient mixes. Some nutrient mixes are more geared towards fruited plants vs. herbs or leafy greens. You would want to investigate what your specific plants need.
- What **nutrients** are in our plant food?
    - Potassium, nitrogen, phosphorus, calcium, iron, and magnesium are the main components. There are some other nutrients too, but in smaller amounts.
- If we have **nutrients left over from last year**, will they still be effective to use this year?
    - Once water is added, it should still be good for about six months before losing potency. In dry form, the granules should last a year or more.
    - Always shake the nutrients before pouring more in to your garden, so that they don't settle to the bottom of the bottle.
- Is there an **affordable Chicago store** to buy more nutrient and sponge supplies?
    - Not sure of any small local businesses, but Home Depot has a lot of our replacement supplies!
- What are the **dilution quantities** of the nutrients?
    - We send the correct amount of nutrients needed for one bottle in our Garden and Refresh Kits. Our bottles are 100mL, so you can add 1 packet of nutrients to each 100mL bottle and then fill them up to the top with water!
- Can the **nutrients be used on plants growing in soil**?
    - The nutrients specifically make up for the nutrients that soil gives, so you don't need them for plants growing in soil!
- Are **seed packets stamped** with their planting season?
    - Not all seeds have dates stamped of when they were packaged or are best used by. Buying from a reputable source will help you have that information. But almost all seeds will tell you the planting season!

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.
- 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.
- If you harvest a lot of one plant all at once, how can you **keep it fresh** for longer?
    - Storing in the fridge slows down the aging process for herbs and leafy greens. You can put some of the leaves with their ends in a cup of water in the fridge, or you can put them in a dampened paper towel in a Ziploc bag in the fridge, which will keep them fresh and usable for a few days longer.
- Should we dry the herbs **on or off the stem**?
    - We recommend storing herbs on the stem, as breaking the plant releases some of the natural oils that are full of nutrients. 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.
- Besides olive oil, what **oil** do you recommend for **infusing with herbs**?
    - Olive oil is a great base, but I've also infused herbs in avocado oil with great results.
- My herbs are **turning brown** when I dry them. How do I prevent this?
    - It is okay for the herbs to brown slightly, but if they turn fully brown, they may be drying too quickly. We recommend air drying for the best results.
- Can you eat **fallen leaves**?
    - The leaves that fall off your plants are dead and don't contain the same nutrients, so you don't want to eat these ones.
- Can you hang your herbs to dry in the **basement**?
    - If your basement has good ventilation and airflow, and has minimal dust and debris, you can absolutely dry your herbs there.
- Is it safe to **eat the roots**?
    - Not all roots are edible, so first, check to see if your plant has edible roots. If the roots are edible, you can eat those grown in a hydroponic garden, but you will want to clean them thoroughly before eating.

- Can you make a **potpourri** using basil?
    - We haven't made potpourri before, but you definitely can! You can also dry basil or other fragrant herbs or flowers and mix it with uncooked rice to make a sachet for your drawer or your closet.
- What is a good **cookie recipe for edible flowers**?
    - You can substitute other edible flowers for dandelions in our dandelion shortbread recipe, which you can find at the end of this short video: https://youtube.com/shorts/kUG8Y9ar-I8.
    - Basic recipe: Combine 1 c softened butter, ½ c sugar, 3 tbsp honey, 2 c flour, a pinch of salt, and about 2 tsp of your edible flower of choice (such as dandelion blooms). Roll into log, chill until firm. Slice and bake at 325° for 15-20 minutes.
- How can you preserve herbs and leaves for flower arrangements, if you want to include dried herbs in the arrangement?
    - Dehydrate the herbs on the stem, in an oven on very low, or a dehydrator. That will keep them upright on their stems for arranging! Woody herbs like thyme or rosemary will work well for this due to their structure, but we can't grow these in our hydroponic garden.

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!
- I've been infusing peppermint in my water, but the **flavor is weak**. How can I make it stronger?
    - If the flavor of your infusion is weak, rather than putting whole peppermint leaves in your water, you can muddle or tear your leaves first, so they release more flavor. You can also just add more leaves to achieve a stronger flavor.
- Do you have any tips for mint **leaves to grow larger**?
    - There are a couple reasons mint leaves may be on the smaller side. They may not be getting enough of something they need (like water/nutrients/light), so be sure to be consistent with adding water and nutrients and keeping the light 4 inches above the plants.
    - Overcrowding is another reason leaves may be small. When there isn't enough space to grow out, the plant will produce smaller leaves. One way to make sure our plants have enough space to grow is to make sure there is only one (or 2) sprouts per pod and to space the pods out, so the plant has room to grow.
- My mint is outside in a pot, but it gets furry white bulbs on ends. Is it okay to prune and clip that off?
    - Yes, you can cut those off, and the mint will continue growing! Pruning will help the overall plant grow more healthily and fuller.
- How do you control mint from spreading too much?
    - If planting in soil, put it in a container, even if planting outside! You can also plant it outside and aggressively prune it. Growing it in your hydroponic garden is also a great way to keep it contained!
- What are some good uses or recipes for mint?
    - You can use mint in smoothies, teas, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern dishes, cocktails and non-alcoholic cocktails like Mojitos and Mint Juleps, lemonades, spring rolls, infused water with cucumber, and raita. These are just some examples that we brainstormed and shared during Garden Club!

Dandelion

- Can dandelion tea be sun brewed?
    - Yes!
- Does dandelion have vitamin K2?
    - Yes!
- Do we need to boil the roots in water?
    - For the tea, you'll want to boil them. For adding them to a salad, you just need to wash them, no need to boil the water when cleaning.
- Are there are any restrictions on dandelion tea?
    - One cup per day is probably enough, since dandelion is so loaded with the nutrients it contains. If you're on diuretic medication, consult your doctor, and you likely will not want to drink dandelion tea.
- Are all those nutrients in the dandelion in all parts of the plant, or are some only in the flower, leaves, or roots?
    - All parts are loaded with those benefits. The roots probably have the most, but you still get a lot from the leaves and flower petals, so use all the parts!
- Could we use the white dandelions after the yellow flowers go away for tea?
    - The white part is actually the seeds – you don't want to eat those or make tea with them, but you can save them to plant more dandelions!
- For dandelion tea, do you use the leaf or the flower, and do you dry it first?
    - You can make tea using fresh or dried leaves. When drying leaves, make sure you dry them as whole as possible, to keep all the natural oils in the plant to preserve the benefits, and store them in an airtight container.
- Is this a different type of dandelion than the ones you see served on restaurant salads, for example?
    - There are some dandelions specifically grown for salads (red dandelions), but they are essentially the same plants as the dandelions we are growing, with the same benefits.
- What seasoning or other flavors do you recommend with dandelions?
    - Dandelions have a stronger flavor, so a stronger-flavored dressing, like a balsamic glaze, or adding fruit, like strawberries, helps to cut that flavor. You may also enjoy adding honey, goat cheese, and nuts.
    - For dandelion tea, you can add in honey or ginger root to change the flavor.
- Any suggestions for what to do with dandelion powder? (As opposed to dandelion root.)

    - It may work for fiber dyeing. You can also use a bit of it in baking or other recipes that call for dandelion root, but a little goes a long way.
- How do you use dandelion root as a replacement for coffee?
    - You would roast the roots in the oven for about 30 minutes at the lowest temperature your oven will go, and then steep it like tea.
- Does anyone know how to make a dandelion **tincture** but without alcohol?
    - You can use dandelion in apple cider vinegar as a tincture in place of alcohol. If you'd like to use alcohol, you can use a clear alcohol like vodka.
    - To Make: Fill a glass jar halfway with your fresh herb (I'll typically use mason jars). Add your liquid (apple cider vinegar or clear alcohol that's safe for drinking) to cover about two inches above the herbs. Cover the jar with parchment paper and seal tightly with the lid. Shake about twice a day for about a month. Strain liquid through a cheesecloth or coffee filter. *Note: Dried herbs will soak up more liquid so you may need to add more.*
    - Tinctures are taken orally, under the tongue so it enters the bloodstream quickly, and usually with a dropper in small amounts (generally 2 drops).

Basil

- When should we harvest basil?
    - You should harvest the plants when the leaves look the size that you would normally buy in the grocery store! Basil is good at any size, but about the size of a coin or larger is a great size.
- Is basil good to put in salads? If so, how many leaves should we use to not overpower everything else?
    - This is totally up to your personal preference, but I like cutting up just a few leaves in a salad so you can get small bursts of flavor in more bites (rather than full leaves).
- Can you eat too much basil?
    - Always consult with your medical team and eat in moderation!
- What should you do if your basil plant grows flowers?
    - You want to pinch or cut those flowers off, to encourage the basil leaves to grow more.
- How should I harvest my basil plant to encourage bushy growth rather than long stems?
    - The best method to prevent long stems is to prune the plant aggressively, leaving only one or two nodes of growth on the plant. This encourages growth both up and out.
- Are basil flowers edible or usable in cooking?

- You can eat basil flowers, but the leaves have a stronger flavor. If you would like your basil to keep growing, it is best to prune them off the plant, as the flowers stop upward growth.

Cilantro

- Can cilantro be chopped up like parsley, placed in plastic bag, and stored in the freezer?
  - Yes! For more ways to preserve herbs, check out the Harvesting and Preserving Herbs handout on the resource page.
- Does cilantro retain its health benefits when dried?
  - The health benefits are in the natural oils the herbs have. When dried, they will naturally lose some of those benefits. One way to make sure the dried herbs retain as much of the natural oils as possible is to dry and store the herbs whole, as cutting/breaking/chopping releases some of those oils.
- How much cilantro do you have to consume to get the health benefits?
  - While there isn't a specific amount that will work for everyone, it's a good idea to integrate it into your regular diet. We believe the recommended amount is *up to* ¼–½ cup per day.
- Can you eat cilantro stems? What about the flowers?
  - Yes and yes! The stems will taste the same as the leaves but the flowers are a milder taste.

Chamomile

- Do you have to dry the chamomile blooms before using them?
  - You do not have to dry them first; you can also use fresh flowers to make tea.
- Can you also use the leaves for tea?
  - You can, but the leaves don't have as much of the health benefits or the nutrients, those are mostly in the blooms. You can also use the chamomile leaves for art making, like nature printing!
- After the chamomile blooms, do you need to replant it?
  - Ruthe has experienced chamomile plants blooming twice. Pluck the blooms as soon as they bloom, prune the plant, and you should be able to get two rounds of blooms from the same plant before needing to replant.
- What is the best way to use chamomile topically for eczema or other skin conditions or irritations?

    - As always, consult a healthcare provider! We have a handout on Tinctures, Teas, and Creams, so if your healthcare provide recommends creams, you can find recipes there. With chamomile, even drinking or breathing in the aroma will also have benefits for your skin, so if you cannot apply it to your skin, you can drink or use chamomile for aromatherapy.
    - Do you crush the chamomile to use in lotions?
        - Yes, you would want to crush the blooms to release the nutrients or health benefits to infuse into the lotion or cream.
- Do you have to pollinate the chamomile?
    - Not in the hydroponic garden!
- Chamomile grew well but had very few buds. Any suggestions?
    - Staying on top of pruning may help. Sometimes there may be fewer buds than other times. Ruthe typically sees blooms about twice a year.

Thyme

- Where do you keep thyme in the house does it need a lot of **sunlight**?
    - It can use as much light as possible! If it's not under a light like the one in your hydroponic garden, put it near a window, ideally where it can get 6-8 hours of direct sunlight each day.
- What is the best way to get **thyme oil** from the herb?
    - Consider "harvest over hard work" – you probably want to make an infused oil (letting your thyme infuse into an existing carrier oil), rather than trying to extract pure essential oil from a thyme plant, which will take a lot of time and effort.
- There are many **varieties of thyme** – which seeds would you buy?
    - French or English thyme are most frequently used! Lemon thyme and carraway thyme are currently increasing in popularity at garden centers.
- How to use thyme for **pest control**?
    - It works as a companion plant – it can drive pests away from your other plants. You can also burn dried thyme, and the smoke will drive pests away. (Be safe when doing this!)
    - Would thyme planted outside also deter squirrels and rabbits?
        - Really pungent herbs will work better for this – peppermint or lavender work. Marigolds also deter squirrels.

Garden Journaling

- What information is the most useful to track in your journal?

- You want to note what you're planting and when you're planting it. Tracking the growth window (how long it takes to sprout) and harvest window (when do you harvest) and comparing to the timelines you expected can help you catch problems and troubleshoot. It is also helpful to journal if you notice any discoloration or pests (how many pests, or how many yellowed leaves, for example), so you can know if a problem is getting worse, or how different treatments impact your plants.

Tinctures, Teas, Creams, etc.

- How can you make **body lotion** using herbs or flowers?
  - A simple recipe for body lotion includes a 1:1 ratio of shea butter and oil, such as coconut oil, argon oil, or sweet almond oil. To include herbs or flowers in your lotion, place the herbs or flowers in an airtight jar and cover with oil. Leave for about two weeks and then strain the oil to use in your lotion.
- Can you use a recycled jar, like a spaghetti sauce jar, to make tinctures, if cleaned really well?
  - Yes, this would work as an option, similar to a mason jar. When storing, make sure to keep your tincture out of direct light to preserve it, or transfer it to a dark-colored jar.
- Could you use a microwave for the hot process to make infused oils?
  - We recommend using a double boiler instead to slowly and evenly distribute the heat. It's hard to achieve this with a microwave.
- Can you use eucalyptus leaves for the cream?
  - Yes!
- What is an alternative option for shea butter for people allergic to shea?
  - Cocoa butter, coconut oil, almond oil, or jojoba oil can all work! When using an oil that's a little more liquid at room temperature, it won't have the same cream texture, but it will still work similarly as a moisturizer.
- Do you have a suggested resource for bulk shea butter and cocoa butter?
  - A local co-op or farmer's market is a good option!
  - Some recommendations from participants include:
    - https://www.madinaonline.com/
    - Wholesale Essential Oils, Soap Making Supplies & More | Bulk Apothecary
    - There is a store on 71st and Stewart that sells shea butter, as well as a company on the west side by Laramie and Congress.
- Is there an oil or creme base that absorbs better for those with dry skin?

    - All the carrier oils we've mentioned have different benefits, so you may want to try multiple options to see what works best for your skin and preferences. Sweet almond oil might be a good option for dry skin.
- Can you use **rose petals** with these recipes?
    - Yes! You'll want to separate the petals to dry them, to speed up the drying process (instead of drying the whole rose hanging upside-down, which will work but take longer). You can add dried rose petals like you would another dried herb or flower.
    - Can you dry rose petals in the microwave for these recipes?
        - Yes, but you may have issues with the steam releasing more of the plant oils during the drying process, so you'll have less of the benefits or aroma in the dried petals from the microwave. Air-drying or drying in a dehydrator would be a good option!
- What is good for **sunburn**?
    - You can use our recipes on the Tinctures, Teas, and Creams handout to make a lotion or cream with any herbs that feel cooling. Adding in aloe vera is also a great idea!
- Do you recommend any brands of **store-bought teas**?
    - Asian markets tend to have a lot of dried herbs and flowers that you can use to make your own blends, if you do not want to grow the herbs and flowers yourself.
    - Pro tip: add your own produce to your storebought teas to increase the health benefits!
- If I want to buy essential oils, what are some **trusted essential oil brands**?
    - Young Living, DoTerra, Plant Therapy, Revive, Rocky Mountain Oils, Eden's Garden, Mountain Rose Herbs, Jade Bloom, Now, Aura Cacia