A great introduction to microgreens

What are microgreens, how do they grow, and what can they bring to your life?

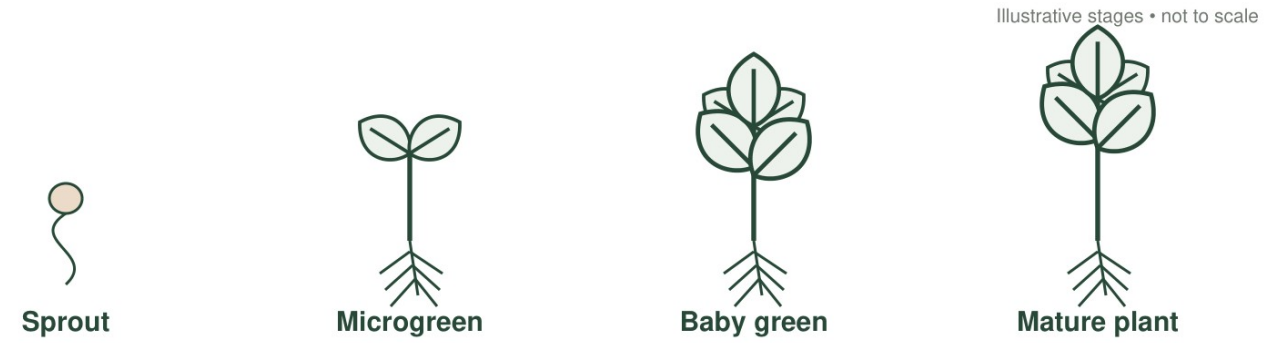
Microgreens offer a small-scale way to explore growing food and bring something fresh to the table. This introduction explains what they are, how they develop, and how different varieties can fit into everyday meals.

01

Meet your microgreens

Microgreens are young edible plants harvested for their stems and leaves. The word “microgreens” refers to a stage of growth rather than a single species: radish, broccoli, cabbage, and many other familiar plants can be grown as microgreens. Their roots stay behind when the greens are harvested. [1]

A small tray can produce a colourful patch of greens without the space needed for mature vegetables. Many varieties reach harvest in approximately 7–21 days from sowing, although some take longer. Temperature, light, variety, and your preferred size all influence the timing. [1]

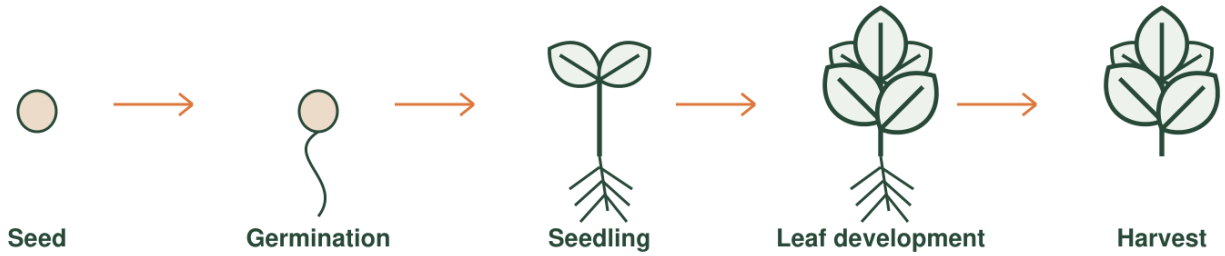


Growth stage	What makes it different
Sprouts	Harvested soon after germination, usually eaten with the seed and root attached.
Microgreens	Young stems and leaves cut above the growing surface; roots stay behind.
Baby greens	Larger young leaves, harvested after more true leaves have developed.
Mature plants	Plants grown to a later stage for the crop’s usual harvest, such as leaves, roots or fruit.

These stages offer different ingredients. A radish microgreen provides a peppery leaf and stem rather than the swollen root of a mature radish.

02

How microgreens grow



Inside the seed

A seed contains a young plant and stored reserves. These reserves provide energy and building materials for germination and early development, before the leaves can support the plant through photosynthesis.

From seed to seedling

Water uptake begins germination. The first root emerges, followed by the shoot. Roots anchor the seedling and take up water while the stem and first leaves expand.

Seed leaves and true leaves

The first leaves are called cotyledons, or seed leaves. They are already present within the seed. The true leaves that follow usually look more like those of the mature plant. In many microgreens, harvest falls around the seed-leaf or early true-leaf stage.

What supports growth

Water keeps plant tissues hydrated. Oxygen supports respiration, including in the roots. A suitable temperature allows these processes to work well. Roots need both moisture and oxygen, so the growing environment matters as much as the water itself.

Why light matters

As leaves develop, light powers photosynthesis: the plant uses light energy to make sugars from water and carbon dioxide. These sugars support continued growth. With too little light, seedlings may become pale and stretched. Sunlight or a suitable grow light can provide the energy they need. [3]

Growing without soil

Growing mats, coconut coir and other suitable media can hold moisture and support roots without garden soil. The right medium depends on the crop and system. Seed reserves support early growth, but they do not allow a plant to grow indefinitely on water alone. [2]

Why some crops start covered

A germination cover can help retain moisture. Some methods also use darkness or gentle pressure while seedlings establish. The approach varies by crop; seedlings move into light when they are ready for the next stage. [2]

03

Explore the varieties

Start with flavours you enjoy. Radish, broccoli and kale are straightforward introductions; peas and sunflower involve more preparation. These categories describe practical differences in care, rather than a formal ranking.

Variety	Ease and preparation	Sowing to harvest[1]	Flavour and texture	Everyday uses
Radish	Straightforward Usually no soaking	8–12 days	Peppery; crisp stems	Tacos, sandwiches, salads
Broccoli	Straightforward Usually no soaking	8–12 days	Mild broccoli flavour; tender	Eggs, wraps, bowls
Kale	Straightforward Little seed preparation	8–12 days	Cabbage-like; sometimes nutty	Salads, sandwiches
Kohlrabi	Straightforward Little seed preparation	6–10 days	Mild, slightly sweet; tender	Wraps, slaws, garnishes
Red cabbage	Straightforward Small seeds need even moisture	8–12 days	Mild cabbage flavour; colourful	Slaws, bowls, sandwiches
Mustard	Straightforward Small seeds need even moisture	8–12 days	Spicy; delicate leaves	Sandwiches, eggs, savoury dishes
Bok choy / pak choi	Straightforward Avoid overcrowding	8–12 days	Gentle cabbage flavour; tender	Bowls, salads, soup topping
Pea shoots	More hands-on Usually soaked first	8–10 days	Sweet pea flavour; substantial crunch	Salads, sandwiches, bowls
Arugula / rocket	More hands-on Gel-forming seeds; do not presoak	6–8 days	Peppery; delicate texture	Pizza, pasta, salads
Sunflower	More hands-on Soaking and hull removal	9–10 days	Nutty; thick, crunchy shoots	Salads, wraps, sandwiches

[1] Approximate published examples. Timing varies with cultivar, temperature, light and preferred harvest size. Follow your selected crop's instructions for preparation and timing. [2, 6]

Choose a flavour first

For a mild introduction, try broccoli or bok choy. Choose radish or mustard for a peppery finish, pea shoots for sweetness, or sunflower for a nutty crunch. Purple varieties of cabbage and kohlrabi add colour as well as flavour.

Use seeds intended for edible microgreen production and varieties known to be suitable. Not every vegetable has edible young stems and leaves. [5]

04

Why they are harvested young

Microgreens are harvested for their small leaves, tender stems and characteristic flavour. Many are enjoyed at the seed-leaf or early true-leaf stage, but different crops reach their preferred stage at different times. [1, 2]

As plants develop, stems lengthen, leaves change shape and texture becomes more substantial. Readiness is a combination of leaf development, crop appearance and eating quality, alongside the calendar.

With suitable conditions, the plants can keep growing. A densely planted microgreen tray, however, gives each plant little space. Growing to maturity usually calls for different spacing and ongoing care.

05

Microgreens in everyday food

Microgreens can fit into meals you already make. A handful in a sandwich, a scattering over eggs or a fresh finish for soup can introduce a new flavour without a new recipe.

What they bring	Simple ways to enjoy them
Crunch	Pea shoots and sunflower add bite to wraps, salads and sandwiches. Pair with avocado, eggs or roasted vegetables.
A peppery finish	Radish, mustard and arugula bring a sharper flavour to tacos, pasta or toast. Start with a small amount and taste as you go.
Fresh flavour and colour	Broccoli, kohlrabi and bok choy suit bowls and eggs. Purple cabbage or kohlrabi adds contrast. Finish hot dishes just before serving to retain a fresh texture.

A place in a varied diet

Microgreens contribute nutrients as well as flavour. Research shows that vitamin and carotenoid concentrations differ between varieties; growing conditions, harvest age and serving size also matter. Enjoy them alongside other vegetables and foods as part of a varied diet. [4]

Ready to try growing?

Choose a variety you would enjoy eating, then follow its crop-specific growing guide for sowing, care and harvest details.

Explore Savi growing resources

References

1. Penn State Extension — Growing Microgreens
2. Utah State University Extension — Grow Your Own Microgreens
3. University of Minnesota Extension — Lighting for indoor plants and starting seeds
4. USDA ARS — Specialty Greens Pack a Nutritional Punch
5. University of Illinois Extension — Small but mighty microgreens are easy to grow indoors
6. Bootstrap Farmer — Ultimate Microgreen Cheat Sheet