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**Alaska Indoor Gardening Curriculum**



**Windowsill Gardening Information**

**Author/Source(s):** Adapted from an original lesson by Una Kernodle, Anchorage School District

A windowsill is a great place to grow plants such as herbs or leafy veggies to have handy when cooking. Windowsills with eastern or southern exposure are prime locations for a small classroom garden. Western-facing windows give off intense afternoon heat, making life challenging for less healthy plants.

The shorter days of winter do not provide the required 6 to 8 hours of sun for most plants, so you will need to use a supplemental light source that provides full UV spectrum light for your plants. You will also want to have the light on a timer so that it gets the right amount of sun. To learn more about lighting systems appropriate for the classroom, read [“Lighting Handout”](http://www.fairbankssoilwater.org/user-files/Indoor%20Gardening%20Lighting%20Systems%20Handout.docx)

Many plants do well in a well-lit warm window, but not all veggies will do well with only a little soil. Be sure to pick your plants carefully. Most herbs are not only great for cooking but are generally prolific and long lived if cared for properly. Most herbs are also super easy to start. You can cut a branch from an outside plant and stick it in potting soil. You can buy seeds—although you'll wait longer for finished herbs or you can purchase small seedlings. These herbs are great for a windowsill garden: lavender, rosemary, thyme, tarragon, parsley, oregano, mint, basil, marjoram, sage.

Edible plants for windowsill gardens include those that can tolerate some shade and do not require much humidity. Suitable foods to grow on a windowsill include: lettuce, radish, cherry tomato, kale, bell pepper, green onion, spinach.

Locate your windowsill garden where it will not be subject to a draft or the dry air from a heat vent and keep your box evenly moist. For more information on soil preparation, read [“Garden Soil Exploration Lesson”](http://www.fairbankssoilwater.org/user-files/Garden%20Soil%20%20Exploration%20Lesson.docx)

**Important note**: Since there are no bees indoors to pollinate growing plants in windowsills, you will have to hand pollinate the plants using a small paintbrush to transfer the pollen from one plant to another if you are trying to develop fruit and vegetables.

If you choose a kitchen planter that is too small, your herbs and veggies won't like it. Too big, and it won't fit on a windowsill. Find a kitchen herb planter about 4 inches deep and as wide as your sill will allow. Plenty of cute, clever kitchen herb planters can dress up your classroom. Consider painting terra-cotta kitchen plant pots with chalkboard paint, then writing the herb names on the sides. Another trick: Add stakes so you know what's what. You can repurpose other containers, like a tea tin, but just make sure it has a drainage hole and a saucer to catch excess water.

**Resources**

**Books:**

*Gardening Indoors with Soil and Hydroponics* by George Van Patten

ISBN: 978-1-878823-32-8

*How a Seed Grows* by Helene J. Jordan, illustrated by Loretta Krupinski

ISBN-13: 978-0-06-445107-9; ISBN-10: 0-06-445107-0

*The Container Expert* by Dr. D. G. Hessayon

ISBN: 0-903505-43-6 1998

*Vertical Gardening: Grow Up, Not Out, For More Vegetables and Flowers in Much Less Space*

by Derek Fell ISBN: 978-1-60529-083-6

**Websites:**

Gardening Knowhow: <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/special/containers/winter-windowsill-garden.htm>

KidsKonnect – General Gardening information: <https://kidskonnect.com/science/gardens/>

Johnny’s Selected Seeds Growing Center Information: <http://www.johnnyseeds.com/growers-library/growing-center.html>

Kids Gardening : [https://kidsgardening.org/](https://kidsgardening.org/%20)

Renee’s Garden Resources: [https://www.reneesgarden.com/blogs/gardening-resources](https://www.reneesgarden.com/blogs/gardening-resources%20)