

YOUR FREE READER'S COMPANION

The Microgreens Grow Pack

A companion to The Microgreens Growing Bible · by Tessa Hartley

Thanks for picking up the book. This companion is the part you keep by the tray: tape it to the side of your shelf rack, prop it on the windowsill, or fold it into your grow notebook. It's the crop chart you check before you sow, the day-by-day cycle you run for almost any seed, the troubleshooting table for the three problems that sink beginners, a starter gear list you can take to the cart, and the three complete setups side by side so you can pick one and copy it exactly. Real numbers, straight from the book, no filler.

Almost every beginner failure is one of three things, and once you see them you can't unsee them: mold from too much water and too little airflow, leggy pale greens from too little light, or patchy germination from bad seed or bad contact. Fix those three and every tray comes out beautiful. When a tray goes wrong, don't change five things at once. Change one, usually water down or light up, and watch the next tray. Microgreens grow fast enough that they'll tell you within a few days whether you got it right. Keep this by the trays and check it before you toss anything. - Tessa

The Beginner Crop Chart

Start at the top and work down. Soak is whether to pre-soak the seed before sowing and for how long. Blackout is days under cover in the dark. Total days is sowing to cutting. Yield is a rough per-1020-tray cut weight. Difficulty is how forgiving the crop is. Flavor is what you're in for. Times shift a little with your room temperature and light, so treat these as a reliable starting map, not gospel.

Start here: the easy, forgiving crops

None of these need soaking, which is half of why they're so beginner-friendly. Grow only these for your first month. They forgive almost every beginner mistake.

Crop	Soak	Blackout (days)	Total days	Yield/tray	Difficulty	Flavor
Radish	No	3-4	7-9	8-12 oz	Easiest	Spicy, peppery, clean bite
Broccoli	No	3-4	8-10	6-9 oz	Easy	Mild, fresh, faintly cabbagey
Kale	No	3-4	8-11	6-8 oz	Easy	Mild, sweet
Cabbage	No	3-4	8-11	6-9 oz	Easy	Very mild, sweet
Mustard	No	3	8-10	6-9 oz	Easy	Hot, sharp, horseradishy
Kohlrabi	No	3-4	8-11	6-8 oz	Easy	Mild, sweet
Arugula	No (never soak)	3-4	8-11	5-8 oz	Easy*	Nutty, peppery
Cress	No (never soak)	2-3	7-10	5-8 oz	Easy*	Sharp, peppery, tangy

*Arugula and cress are easy to grow but mucilaginous - they form a clear gel coat the moment they get wet. Sow on a damp surface, never soak them, bottom-water, keep good airflow. Everything else in this group is plug-and-play.

The heavy yielders (a little more technique)

Pea and sunflower are the big, satisfying, high-yield crops. They get an overnight soak because their seed coats are thick, and a head start on water means even germination.

Crop	Soak	Blackout (days)	Total days	Yield/tray	Difficulty	Flavor
Pea shoots	Yes, 8-12 hr	3-4	9-12	10-16 oz	Easy	Sweet, fresh, crunchy
Sunflower	Yes, 8-12 hr	3-4	8-12	10-16 oz	Medium	Nutty, crunchy
Wheatgrass	Yes, 8-12 hr	2-3	9-12	10-14 oz	Easy	Sweet, grassy (juiced)
Beet	Yes, 6-8 hr	4-6	10-14	6-9 oz	Medium	Earthy, sweet
Swiss chard	Yes, 6-8 hr	4-6	10-14	6-9 oz	Medium	Earthy, mild

The slow and fussy ones (grow these last)

Nail the easy crops first. These reward patience once your hands know what a healthy tray looks like.

Crop	Soak	Blackout (days)	Total days	Yield/tray	Difficulty	Flavor
Amaranth	No	3-4	10-14	4-6 oz	Medium	Mild, gorgeous color
Chia	No (mist only)	3-4	8-12	4-6 oz	Hard	Mild, gel seed
Flax	No (mist only)	3-4	8-12	4-6 oz	Hard	Mild, gel seed
Cilantro	No	4-6	14-21	4-7 oz	Hard	Bright, citrusy
Basil	No	4-6	14-20	4-6 oz	Hard	Sweet, fragrant

A few notes that don't fit in a cell:

- Soak only the big, hard seeds. Pea, sunflower, wheatgrass, beet, and chard get an overnight soak. Everything small (radish, broccoli, the brassicas) goes in dry. The gel seeds (chia, flax) never soak - mist only.
- The gel/mucilaginous seeds (chia, flax, basil, arugula, cress) form a slimy coat when wet. Don't soak them and don't bottom-water during germination - mist the surface and keep good airflow, or they slime and mold.
- Yields are a planning tool, not a promise. If you need a pound of greens for the week, two trays of pea or sunflower will do it. You'd need three or four trays of the lighter brassicas for the same weight.
- The fast crops anchor your rotation. Radish and broccoli, ready in about a week, are what you sow most often. The slow ones (cilantro, basil) are occasional treats, not staples.

The 5-Step Grow Cycle Checklist

Almost every microgreen follows the same five steps, in the same order, regardless of crop. Learn this rhythm once and you've learned how to grow microgreens, period. The crop chart just tweaks the dials. The machine is always this.

1. Sow - Fill a holed tray with 1 to 1.5 in (2.5 to 4 cm) of pre-moistened medium, leveled and lightly pressed flat. Spread weighed seed in a single even layer, corner to corner. Then the step beginners skip: press the seed into firm contact with the damp medium with a flat lid or your clean palm. Don't bury it - microgreens are surface-sown. Light mist.
2. Blackout / weight - Cover for total darkness (a second 1020 tray flipped on top, a cake pan, a box). For vigorous crops add 5 to 15 lb (2 to 7 kg) of weight on top. Darkness keeps humidity high for fast even germination and makes the stems stretch tall. Weight forces even germination, drives roots down into a thick white mat, and pushes the tray up as one level carpet. Small brassicas need little or no weight. Gel seeds (basil, chia, cress) get a light cover, no weight.
3. Uncover to light - When the seedlings have lifted the cover and stand about 1 in (2.5 cm) tall, pale yellow or white, pull the cover and the weight and move to light. They green up within a day or two.
4. Water - Bottom-water, all the way through. Lift the holed tray, pour a half cup to a cup (120 to 240 mL) into the solid tray below, set the holed tray back down, and let the medium wick it up. Pour off any water left after 10 to 20 minutes. Dry leaves don't grow mold. Keep the light close, 2 to 4 in (5 to 10 cm) above the tops, 12 to 16 hours a day, with a low fan moving air.
5. Harvest - Cut with clean sharp scissors above the soil line, 7 to 14 days from sowing, when stems are 1.5 to 3 in (4 to 7.5 cm) tall and the seed leaves (cotyledons) are fully open. Rinse only just before eating. Store dry.

The day-by-day timeline

Run this for almost any crop. The day numbers shift a little (radish is on the fast end, pea and sunflower a touch longer), but the shape is always the same.

Day	What's happening	What you do
0	Sowing	Level medium, sow at the right density, press in, mist, cover dark + weight
1-3	Germination (blackout)	Check daily, mist if dry, keep covered and weighted
3-4	Seedlings lift the cover	Remove cover + weight, move to light, start bottom-watering
4-7	Greening + growth	Light 12-16 hr/day, bottom-water daily, fan for airflow
7-14	Mature	Cut at the right height, rinse only before eating, store dry

The Troubleshooting Table

Tape this one next to your trays. Nearly everything that goes wrong is in here, and notice how often the cause traces back to the same three villains: too much water, too little light, or bad seed contact.

Problem	Likely cause	Fix
Fuzzy white/gray mold	Too wet, too dense, poor airflow	Add a fan, bottom-water only, sow a touch thinner, lower humidity; toss badly molded trays
White fuzz only at the stem base (not spreading, disappears when misted)	Root hairs - not mold, this is normal	Leave it alone; it's healthy roots reaching for water
Seedlings flop and rot at the soil line	Damping off (fungal), too wet	Improve airflow, water less, sanitize trays, use fresh medium and clean seed
Tall, pale, stretched, falling over	Leggy - too little light, or left in blackout too long	More light, closer light (2 to 4 in), uncover on time
Patchy, uneven germination	Uneven sowing, dry spots, old/cheap seed, poor seed-to-medium contact	Sow evenly and densely, mist evenly, press seed gently into the surface, weight during blackout, buy fresh quality seed
Yellow/pale greens that won't green up	Not enough light after blackout	Get them under brighter light; they green within a day once lit
Sunflower won't shed its black hulls	Hulls stuck on cotyledons	Heavier weight during blackout, blackout a day longer, rinse/rub hulls off at harvest
Greens taste bitter or harsh	Over-mature, or stressed by heat/drought	Harvest a little earlier, keep temps 65-75 degF (18-24 degC), water consistently
Tray dries out and stalls	Under-watering (common on thin hydro mats)	Check water daily, keep a film in the bottom tray, bottom-water consistently
Slimy, clumped tiny seeds	Gel seeds soaked or over-wet	Don't soak chia/flax/basil; mist only, more airflow
Slow or no germination	Cold room, old seed, seed buried too deep	Use a heat mat or warmer spot (65-75 degF), fresh seed, don't bury - sow on the surface
Greens slime in the fridge	Stored wet, packed too tight, cut too late	Dry thoroughly before storing, pack loose, keep at 38-40 degF (3-4 degC), cut at peak not past it
Smell sour/off	Anaerobic wet medium or rot	Less water, more airflow, fresh medium, sanitize trays

The three villains in one line: too much water gives you mold, damping off, and slime. Too little light gives you leggy, pale, falling-over greens. Bad seed contact gives you patchy, uneven germination. When something goes wrong, change one lever, usually water down or light up, and watch the next tray.

The Starter Gear List

Print this, take it to the store (or the cart), and you'll have everything for a full grow. Starred items are optional but nice.

Containers and medium

- ☐ 1020 trays - solid (no-hole) bottoms, the reservoir you pour water into
- ☐ 1020 trays - holed, to nest inside the solid ones (your soil and seeds go here)
- ☐ Growing medium: seed-starting mix or coco coir - OR hydroponic mats
- ☐ A second tray or lid for the blackout cover

Seeds

- ☐ 2 to 4 crops to start (radish, broccoli, pea, sunflower are the friendly four)
- ☐ Bought as untreated / microgreen / sprouting seed, from a real supplier

Water and light

- ☐ Spray bottle for misting
- ☐ Watering can or jug for bottom-watering
- ☐ LED shop light(s) - plain bright white (5000K to 6500K) is fine, no fancy spectrum needed
- ☐ Outlet timer for the lights (set 12 to 16 hours a day)
- ☐ * Heat mat (for cold rooms / faster germination), on a GFCI outlet

Airflow and cleanliness

- ☐ Small clip fan (aimed across, not at, the trays - the cheapest mold insurance there is)
- ☐ Clean scissors or a sharp knife for harvest
- ☐ Dish soap + a food-safe sanitizer for trays
- ☐ * Salad spinner for drying cut greens

Harvest and storage

- ☐ Clean containers or clamshells
- ☐ Clean kitchen towels for drying
- ☐ Fridge space at 38-40 degF (3-4 degC)

A realistic starter budget

Ballpark US prices to get your first few trays going. Most of it you reuse forever, and once it's bought your only ongoing cost is seed and a little medium - pennies per harvest against \$30-a-pound microgreens at the store.

Item	What it's for	Rough cost
2 to 3 pairs of 1020 trays (holed + solid)	Growing + bottom-watering	\$12-\$25

Seed-starting mix or coco coir brick	The growing medium	\$8-\$15
LED shop light or basic grow light	The greening phase	\$15-\$30
Outlet timer	Hands-off lighting	\$8-\$12
Spray bottle + scissors	Misting + harvest	\$5-\$10 (often already own)
Microgreen seeds (a few crops)	The actual greens	\$10-\$20
Core starter total		~\$60-\$110
Optional: small clip fan	Mold prevention	\$10-\$20
Optional: seedling heat mat	Faster germination in cold rooms	\$15-\$25

Don't overspend on day one. Get a few trays, a bag of medium, a cheap light, and some seed. You can always add the nice toys later, once you've grown a tray you're proud of.

The Three Complete Setups, Compared

Three copyable builds. Pick the one that fits your space and budget, copy it exactly, and don't improvise until you've run it through once. Underneath the gear, all three run on the same backbone: sow dense and even, blackout 3 to 4 days, uncover to good light, water without drowning with airflow moving, cut clean above the medium around day 8 to 12.

	A: Windowsill Starter	B: Shelf-Rack System	C: Soil-Free Hydroponic
Best for	A total beginner proving it works	Steady year-round weekly harvests	Cleanest harvest, sellers, tidy systems
Rough cost	Under \$20	~\$150-\$250 fully kitted	Similar to B, minus soil
Light	A sunny south/east window	One LED shop light per shelf, 2-4 in above	One LED shop light, 2-4 in above
Medium	Seed-starting mix or coir	Seed-starting mix or coir	Hemp/jute hydroponic mat (\$0.50-\$1 each)
Containers	Takeout tubs or one 1020, drainage holes	Several 1020 pairs on a 4-5 shelf wire rack	1020 pairs, solid bottom + holed top
Crops to start	Radish, broccoli, then pea shoots	Radish, broccoli, pea shoots, sunflower	Pea, sunflower, radish, broccoli, kale
Watering	Bottom-water when you can, or mist	Bottom-water daily, fan running	Bottom-water; check daily, mats dry fast
The trade-off	Less light = taller, leaning greens	The workhorse; supplies a real kitchen	Spotless harvest but least forgiving on water

The shelf-rack weekly rhythm

The magic of Setup B is succession sowing - stagger your sowing so something is always coming ripe. Radish is ready in about 8 days, pea and sunflower in about 10 to 12, so a couple of sowings a week means you cut fresh greens on a loop that never stops.

- Sunday: Sow 2 trays. Harvest whatever's ready.
- Wednesday: Sow 2 trays. Harvest whatever's ready. Top up water.
- Daily (2 min): Check water, check for any mold, make sure the fan's running and the lights are on their timer.

Sanitation between trays

When a tray finishes, dump the spent medium and root mat into the compost, then wash the tray with hot soapy water and a quick food-safe sanitizing rinse before it goes back into rotation. Clean trays are most of mold prevention.

That's the pack. Print it, keep it by the trays, and start where you are. The windowsill teaches you the rhythm, the shelf rack gives you the volume, the mats give you the clean harvest - but any one of them gets you eating beautiful greens in under two weeks. When you're ready to go deeper on any crop or dial in your own house numbers, the full walkthrough is waiting in the book.

- Tessa Hartley