

The Aerogarden



I've had an [Aerogarden](#) for about 2 years now. When my wife and I moved into an apartment building, I really missed having my own backyard garden, and I thought that this might, in some small way, act as a replacement. I've been moderately satisfied with the results, and it's fun to grow your own kitchen herbs.

As with all advertised products, the yield isn't what the box or the literature would have you believe. Since I've had my system, I've grown two different herb mixes (the one that comes with the system, and an additional european herb mix) as well as the yellow and red cherry tomato kit. Invariably, one or more of the varieties of herb will take over and dominate the available light unless you diligently trim them back. In my most recent attempt, the savory, chives, and thyme have all suffered at the hands of the overwhelming mint, basil and parsley. As for the tomatoes, the output was pretty disappointing. I think I managed to get fewer than 50 tomatoes for my effort – though the system did have its issues, because water ended up corroding the electrical contact for the internal pump and as such, the water didn't really circulate the way it was supposed to.

When I first got my system, I needed to call service right away. I had assembled the kit per the instructions, but the pump never kicked on like it was supposed to. After walking me through some obvious fixes, the tech person decided I had a faulty base unit, and shipped out a new one, along with a replacement pump, free of charge.



The set up is pretty simple, and you see the seedlings sprouting within a week or two, and you can start harvesting fresh herbs within a month. Maintenance is easy, too. Just add water every so often, or when the red LED lights up, and toss in a couple of fertilizer tablets (which is supposedly completely organic – seaweed somesuch) every week. The seed kits all come with fertilizer, which runs out after about 6 months, though the plants still seem fairly vigorous at that point. Presumably, you could purchase some sort of liquid fertlizer and keep the system going for longer. I've restarted just for the novelty of it.

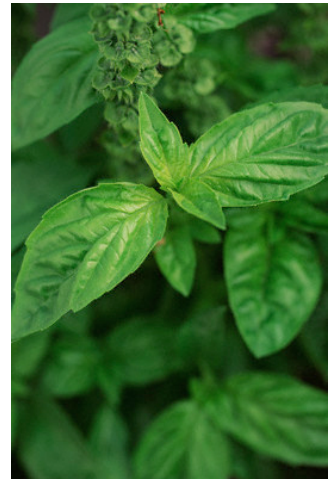
The device costs upwards of \$150, and you need to replace the bulbs once every 2 years or so (another \$25). The seed kits cost \$20, and the growing season on them is 6 months ... or at least, as I said, that's when the fertilizer packs peter out, so you'll need to buy 2 seed kits a year. Add on top of that the cost for the electricity to run it (though it uses florescent lights, so that's pretty inexpensive, really). When you calculate the costs, there's no way you're going to be saving money by using this method to grow your kitchen herbs. Still, it's a fun project, especially if you have kids, or don't have a particularly sunny windowsill, or access to a backyard plot.



[AeroGarden Pro 100 with Gourmet Herb Seed Kit](#) on Amazon.

The Best Way to Store Fresh Herbs

Adding bunches of fresh herbs to your cooking is the easiest way to add huge amounts of flavor. Unfortunately, they can be expensive and tend to go bad quickly. Here's a good, cheap, hassle-free way to store your fresh herbs once you get them home from the market.



First, rinse them under cold water, and if you have a salad spinner, spin them in there to remove excess water. Next, dampen a length of paper towels with cool water. You don't want wet, you want damp. Now, wrap your herbs inside the paper towel, and then put the whole thing in a plastic or zip-top bag, and then into the refrigerator.

Use this method for basil, thyme, dill, tarragon, cilantro, mint, chives, and parsley. And there's no reason to make multiple bundles, just add more herbs as you're rolling up the paper towel. This method also works well for bunches of lettuce, like arugala – though I've found that these store pretty well all by themselves in those plastic bins they come in. It's not so great for the woodier herbs, like rosemary or bay leaves. For them, skip the paper towel, and just slip them into a zip top bag, remove as much air as you can, and put them in the refrigerator.