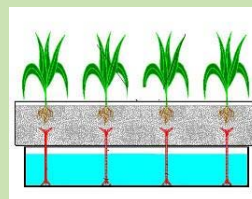


The Gala Garden

Happy New Year 2010!! Perhaps you had a chance over the festive break to catch up with a bit of rest & relaxation, and, if one of your resolutions for this year is to get more in touch with life's simple pleasures, you might enjoy growing your own fruit or vegetables. There's always a way - even if you don't have a garden, you can use pots, window boxes or even a sunny windowsill and we'll talk about this in more detail next month, but for now.....have you ever considered..... HYDROPONICS?

A simple definition of HYDROPONICS is the growing of plants without soil. Plants are supported in a media such as coconut fibre or rockwool and fed an appropriate nutrient solution (organic is available) for their stage of development from seedlings through to mature leaf, flower or fruit. This method is ideal for tomatoes, strawberries, salad veg and herbs. Targeting the plant's needs results in faster growth, higher yields, enhanced flavour and stronger disease and pest resistance. Plants grown this way don't need so much energy to grow roots in order to seek out nutrients and, in Australia this method of food cultivation is now widely used because it saves wasting water and the indiscriminate use of nitrates, pesticides and herbicides. Spain, Holland, Japan, Israel, the USA and the UK are also steadily increasing hydroponic growing on a commercial scale, largely due to environmental concerns.



The techniques used by commercial growers are now available to the home gardener with easy to use kits. These can be as basic as one or more pots on a tray using gravity fed drip irrigation, to lengths of plastic channels (known as 'gulleys') which use a circulation pump. Setting up a system is quick and economical. Once running, maintenance consists of monitoring the nutrients and periodically adding more, plus water. If you have an interest in science (or a competitive spirit!) you'll find this method really exciting and if you simply want a good yield of home grown produce to safely and sustainably feed the family but feel initially daunted by the method, help and advice are at hand.

Systems can be customised to fit any location where there is sufficient light. As they are lightweight, self contained and clean, they can be used all year round in a conservatory, greenhouse, cellar, garage or kitchen, or they can be moved outside in summer. If you don't have enough natural light you can supplement with a form of low energy horticultural lighting which is easy to install and cheap to run. If you are concerned about low temperatures, there are certain varieties eg. of lettuce that are bred to cope with winter growth and your nutrient solution, whether gravity fed or pumped from a butt or smaller plastic reservoir, can be inexpensively heated with a fish tank heater, providing the plants with warmth at their roots, where they need it most.

We'd be happy to show you HYDROPONICS in action down at the nursery!
All the best ~ **Holly.**

www.lowoodnursery.co.

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