

# Life-affirming Gardening for Eldercare

Presented by Garden of Eden Indoor Farming

Indoor gardening projects can bring benefits to retirement communities of all sizes. The projects proposed herein can assist residential and social communities with active engagement in a combination of social and business activity that provides both satisfaction and achievement.

As the world's population becomes older, more urban and more atomized, social engagement becomes ever more important. Indoor gardening can be a key to active living with purpose. It can provide nutrition, often a serious problem for seniors, and it can provide meaningful work without adding stress to daily life.

Consider the case of microgreens. Microgreens are seedlings that are cultivated only to the emergence of the first few true leaves and typically harvested in seven to fourteen days. The hydroponic cultivation proceeds without soil, fertilizers or biocides, just seeds and water!

Microgreens add nutrition, flavor and visual interest to any meal. The varieties range from mixed greens to broccoli to scores of other species. Initially they were added by specialty chefs mainly as garnishes. Research has shown that they are also highly nutritious, often several multiples of the same species cultivated to maturity. Because they are harvested at the seedling stage, little of the energy of the seeds or the growing environment goes into producing stalks or other non-nutritive material. It's all food! When added to a balanced diet, microgreens add nutrition and increase interest in healthy eating due to their novelty and variety.



A shelving unit like that shown can produce in sixteen square feet (1.5 m<sup>2</sup>) about 200 one-ounce servings weekly of nutritious microgreens. (Serving size varies with species grown). Assuming two servings per day, that is enough to satisfy the needs of about  $(200/7/2=)$  14 persons. The consumers will be healthier, and the growers will be productive and engaged.

Such productivity and engagement can have a larger social or economic purpose. A space the size of a typical bedroom can produce about \$1,500 to \$2,000 per week in microgreens at wholesale prices. Packaged for retail or direct distribution to consumers that amount can rise to over \$12,000 per month. The labor requirement is about 20 hours weekly. The point is that a small group of residents or partners can produce enough to create significant income in very little space. The capital investment needed for equipment and materials to create this product flow is under \$5,000. Some training is required.

Now imagine a residential or social congregation of elders, such as a life-care community. Given a group of a half dozen persons sharing the responsibilities of a small in-house business, residents could operate a "commercial" garden, selling produce to the community itself, or it could grow to serve its surrounding neighborhood or parallel facilities with the fresh, local, nutritious produce so often lacking in modern diets. If space within the facility is lacking, then given the productivity of the system, modest rent or profit-sharing with a partner-landlord can be accommodated. The participating residents would share the profits on an equitable basis of their own devising.

It's really no more complicated than that, and [our community](#) stands ready to assist your community with training, equipment and expertise.