

#GARDENING

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Of plant, plate, and palate

Ask anyone who has grown fruits, vegetables, or even culinary herbs if homegrown produce savour better in comparison with store-bought varieties. A gardener's answer will be an unequivocal yes. Even simple green chillies or coriander leaves taste so much better and fresher when they are grown at home.

I have a small backyard, most of which is dedicated to flowers. However, we have been growing edibles for the past two summers. Although not a seasoned vegetable gardener, I can still vouch for the freshness homegrown produce add to my meals. This year, we have grown Malabar spinach (pui shak), red amaranth (lal shak), lemon cucumber, Serrano pepper, two types of eggplants, and three varieties of tomatoes in our small space. We shared our harvest with friends and neighbours, too.

Growing fruits, veggies, and herbs at home gives you the freedom to choose the varieties you love to eat. When you grow your edibles from seeds, the options are even wider. Although it does take some time and effort to germinate seeds, it is still worth it. Some seeds sprout easily, others require controlled conditions. It took our Malabar spinach seeds almost three weeks to sprout, for instance.

I started this piece with praises for the savour and flavour that homegrown foods bring to our taste buds. So, why do homegrown foods taste so much better? There are a number of reasons. For instance, commercial producers tend to grow varieties that give them more yield but take less time to mature. For hobby growers like me, the emphasis is more on quality than quantity. We try to use high quality soil and steer clear of chemical pesticides and fertilisers, which all add to the taste of our produce. Not just taste, garden vegetables are also richer in nutrients.

Supermarket fruits and vegetables



travel long distances; days, even weeks pass before they reach our kitchen. How do you think they still manage to look fresh? They are treated with chemicals or stored in a controlled environment to

retain the fresh and shiny look that freshly harvested foods have. On the other hand, homegrown produce is either eaten or cooked almost right after they are picked. Nothing can beat this sort of freshness!

Homegrown food also tastes better because you have witnessed the whole process it took for the food to reach your plate. The facts that you took care of the plant, watered and fertilised it, clipped off dead leaves, killed bugs, and pulled weeds are enough for a gardener to feel differently towards homegrown foods.

For you to grow herbs and vegetables, it is not necessary to own a plot of ground



at all. We have grown tomatoes, chillies, cucumbers, okras, red amaranth, and eggplants in containers. Herbs are ever easier to grow; mint, basil, and coriander leaves can be conveniently grown in small pots.

Your rooftop or balcony garden can be a source of fresh-nutritious fruits, vegetables, and herbs for you and your family. Yes, you will need to make an investment of time and love, but this is the sort of investment that guarantees a pleasure of the palate. So, why not? The power to 'plant a plate' can be yours.

Photo: Wara Karim

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