

## **Grow, Grow, Grow Your Own**

Mention hydroponics, grow lights, and reflective surfaces in the context of indoor gardening and many minds will travel in one direction. While plenty of folks garden inside for recreation, even more are looking at the food security and self-sufficiency factor. In challenging climates or urban settings, or for those without other access to community gardens or land, setting aside that spare bedroom for a bit o' lettuce, peas, and beans makes economic sense.

Of course, indoor gardening, with its dependence on electrically powered lights, hydroponic/aeroponic systems, and ventilation, isn't the logical method for the post-apocalypse or post-tsunami getting-back-to-nature scenarios. But in the interim, in the interests of perking up our long gray winters (and summers!), tomatoes beckoning from the walk-in closet don't sound half bad.

Hipfish finds Astoria Indoor Gardening owners Oscar Nelson and Gary Reynolds at home, as it were, at their several-month old venture in Astoria.

**Hipfish:** So why indoor gardening? Why you? Why now?

**Oscar Nelson:** I came from the auto industry, but ultimately wasn't happy working for someone else and the constant consumerism. I wanted to do something on my own, more in line with my values and beliefs. I found a private investor, got business plans together, and was brought together with Gary. With some money behind us, we were able to turn this garage—in about 17 very adventurous working days—from raw concrete and just a lot of stuff to what is here now. Our customers and community have been awesome. We've had some ups and downs with folks thinking we're something we're not. But overall people are just ecstatic that we're here. More and more people want to grow their own food, take control of their lives.

**Gary Reynolds:** I couldn't do construction anymore and had the idea for the store for a while. A friend brought me together with Oscar and here we are. We're living our dream—we both show up, slap each other and say, 'are we really doing this?' It's great to be a part of the community here, with the Co-op and Astoria Hempworks, the Fort George . . . We want a greenhouse on the roof, a community indoor garden, get a whole room for starts planted for the Sunday market. Oscar and I are going a different route than almost any indoor shop around. We are actually showing people that you can do this.

**HF:** What can people expect to find here?

**ON:** We have all the supplies for people to do indoor gardening. We have simple systems for people starting out—ebb and flow containers that will fit in the corner of a room—to more elaborate set-ups. A variety of lights, heirloom, non-GMO seeds, nutrients, and soil. "Smart pots," made of a special polypropylene fabric, that supply

more oxygen to the plant roots—lots of things people have never seen before. As Gary said, we are getting geared up to do starts for the Sunday market, and we've got houseplants, vegetable and flower starts in the shop right now. We have a big vision. There is so much to know and do with gardening indoors. You know, you are basically playing Nature. The roots have different requirements being grown inside . . . the lights, temperature, everything needs timing. It's a delicate balance, almost like an artwork getting these things in line.

**HF:** Seems like indoor gardening is a trend; there's a few shops in place or getting started here on the coast. So why would I garden indoors? What is the basic space requirement I would need?

**GR:** 4' by 4' for someone that is just beginning is really the way to go. So you don't get overwhelmed. We advise people to start small, see if you like it, and if it fits your lifestyle. I hate to see people buy thousands of dollars worth of equipment and then they never use it. You can get a lot of food out of a 4' x 4' space--like a walk-in closet.

**ON:** The reason to garden indoors is to have control over it. Outdoors you are constrained to seasons and times; having the lights indoors enables you to garden on your time. The lights affect your mood and the whole indoor space where you use them. Plus there's less watering with the automatic systems, and virtually no weeding. It's great for folks who can't do all the physical labor of outdoor gardening.

**GR:** Different systems are available, from reflective tents to basic ebb and flow systems. You can get started for about \$350. You can grow a lot of food for that.

**ON:** Like outdoor gardening it's really about seeing life from the plant's perspective. Once you get the details down of timing, nutrients and so on, you can have incredibly productive plants. And many people think plants grown indoors taste better.

**HF:** Do you find people using indoor systems to augment outdoor gardens?

**GR:** Well, for example, last year we had a really bad summer. If you want to grow tomatoes say, it's almost impossible to grow them outside. With this system, you can grow them year round if you want. It's a great winter project. It's a trend for people up north, like Alaska.

**ON:** Being able to provide for yourself at least something, especially in the coming years, is going to be imperative. You can't rely on big corporations to give you everything you need.

**HF:** Is there anything that you just *can't* grow inside?

**GR:** Not really—space is the issue. Pumpkins and squash might be a challenge . . . you just have to have the space. You can grow peas, beans . . . as long as you've got a way for them to grow up the wall.

**ON:** The grow boxes we have, you can grow 10 stalks of corn in *one* of them. Eggplant, potatoes. It's amazing what you can do, and all with less work than traditional gardening.

**GR:** We're not the average joe indoor garden shop you come into. Give us some time, be patient, and you'll see us grow. We welcome everyone's interests: orchids, veggies, whatever. We're happy to help in any way. We really want to be a part of the community. We'll be at the Master Gardener's seminar at the fairgrounds on April 16, with information, starts and equipment—come say hello.

Astoria Indoor Garden Supply is open 7 days a week, from 10-6. Oscar and Gary are sincere, friendly, and willing to help with all your indoor gardening needs and questions. Tel: 503.468.0606 web: [www.astoriaIndoor.com](http://www.astoriaIndoor.com) email: AstoriaIndoor@gmail.com

**Fun Fact:**

Growing orchids indoors cleanses the air of volatile compounds—plus it's hip!