BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

AN EXTENDED GUIDE · NO. 1859

Updated November 2026

Indoor Hydroponic Gardens

Fresh herbs and greens on your counter, year-round No soil, no yard, no mess

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com · Atwater, Ohio

Book a visit · billshometech.com/book

What's Inside

Everything in this guide, with page numbers. Skip to whichever chapter answers your question right now.

The Short Version 3

What Hydroponics Actually Means 3

How a Counter-Top Garden Works 4

What You Can Grow 5

Choosing a Garden: Sizes and Brands 6

Pods, Seeds, and the Question of Refills 7

Setting One Up, Step by Step 8

The Light: Your Indoor Sun 9

Feeding, Watering, and Routine Care 9

When Something Goes Wrong 10

What It Costs to Run 11

Recap 12

Everyday Cheat Sheet 13

A Note From Bill 14

Your Visit — and My Promise 15

1 The Short Version

An indoor hydroponic garden grows fresh herbs, salad greens, and small vegetables right on your kitchen counter, year-round, with no soil and no yard. The plants grow in nutrient-enriched water under a built-in light, and the machine does most of the fussing for you — reminding you when to add water and feed, and running the light on a schedule. For anyone who wants fresh basil for cooking, or simply the quiet pleasure of growing something, it is a delightful and surprisingly easy thing to do.

This guide explains what hydroponics actually is, how these counter-top gardens work, what grows well in them, and how to set one up and keep it going. No green thumb required, and no mess — just clean water, a light, and plants that grow faster than they ever would in a pot of dirt by the window.

- Grows herbs and greens in water, under a built-in light, on your counter.
- No soil, no yard, no mess — and it works all winter.
- The machine reminds you when to add water and plant food.
- Perfect for fresh basil, lettuce, and other quick, rewarding plants.

> **TIP**
>
> If you are new to this, start with herbs — basil especially. They grow fast, you use them constantly in the kitchen, and seeing a bare pod become a bushy plant in a couple of weeks is exactly the encouragement that keeps a new gardener going.

2 What Hydroponics Actually Means

Hydroponics is simply growing plants in water instead of soil. It sounds high-tech, but the idea is old and plain: a plant does not actually need dirt. What it needs is water, light, air, and a handful of nutrients, and soil is just the usual way those get delivered. In hydroponics you deliver them directly — the roots sit in water that has the nutrients mixed in, and the plant grows without soil at all.

Because the plant gets exactly what it needs with no digging for it, hydroponic plants often grow faster and fuller than the same plant in a pot of soil. And because there is no dirt, there is no mess, no muddy hands, and far fewer of the pests and diseases that come with soil. For an indoor counter-top garden, that clean, fast, low-fuss nature is the whole appeal.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Plants do not need soil — they need water, light, air, and nutrients. Soil is just the ordinary delivery system. Hydroponics delivers those things directly, which is why it is clean, fast, and perfectly suited to a kitchen counter.

3 How a Counter-Top Garden Works

A counter-top hydroponic garden is a tidy little appliance, and understanding its few parts takes the mystery out of it. There is a water tank or basin in the base, a set of slots where your plant pods sit with their roots reaching into the water, and an arm overhead holding a bright grow light. Many have a small pump that keeps the water moving and aerated, and a simple control panel or app that runs the light and reminds you when to add water and food.

You drop in the pods, fill the tank, add the included plant food, and the garden takes over the routine. The light comes on and off on its own schedule — standing in for the sun — and the water keeps the roots fed. Your job shrinks to topping up the water now and then and adding plant food when the garden tells you to. It really is close to as easy as that.

Part	What it does
Water tank or basin	Holds the nutrient water the roots drink from
Plant pods and slots	Hold the seeds or seedlings with roots in the water

Grow light on an arm	Stands in for the sun, on an automatic schedule
Control panel or app	Runs the light and reminds you to add water and food

> **TIP**
> The built-in grow light is what makes these gardens work anywhere, even a windowless kitchen corner. You are not relying on a sunny windowsill, so the garden grows just as well in the dead of a gray Ohio winter as in June.

4 What You Can Grow

These gardens do best with plants that stay compact and grow quickly, which happily includes most of what you would actually want fresh in the kitchen. Herbs are the stars — basil, mint, parsley, cilantro, dill, chives — and they grow lush and keep producing for months as you snip from them. Leafy salad greens like lettuce and spinach do beautifully too, giving you cut-and-come-again salads from your own counter.

You can also grow small fruiting plants like cherry tomatoes and small peppers in the larger gardens, though they need more light, more room, and more patience. What does not suit a counter-top garden are big root vegetables and sprawling plants — carrots, potatoes, full-sized tomatoes — which simply need more space and depth than the little tank provides. Match your ambitions to the machine and you will rarely be disappointed.

Grows wonderfully	Not suited to a counter garden
Basil, mint, parsley, cilantro, dill	Carrots, potatoes, other root crops
Lettuce, spinach, salad greens	Full-sized tomatoes and large plants
Cherry tomatoes, small peppers (larger units)	Anything that needs deep soil or sprawl

Chives and other compact herbs	Vining plants that outgrow the light

GOOD TO KNOW

Cut-and-come-again is the quiet magic of greens and herbs here. You snip what you need for tonight's dinner, and the plant simply grows more, often for months. One basil pod can season your cooking all winter long.

5 Choosing a Garden: Sizes and Brands

Counter-top gardens come in sizes from a tiny three-pod unit that fits beside the toaster to larger systems that hold a dozen or more plants and even floor-standing towers. For most people a small-to-medium garden holding six to nine plants is the sweet spot: enough for a good supply of herbs and some greens, without taking over the kitchen. Start smaller than you think you need; you can always add a second garden if you catch the bug.

On brands, the landscape has shifted recently and it is worth knowing where things stand. AeroGarden, long the most familiar name, has been wound down by its parent company Scotts Miracle-Gro through 2026, so you may find remaining stock on clearance but should not count on long-term support or new pods from them. Other makers — Click and Grow, Rise Gardens, Lettuce Grow, and various well-reviewed value brands — continue to sell counter-top and larger systems.

Because this corner of the market changes, check that whatever you buy still has a maker standing behind it and a steady supply of pods.

- Sizes run from tiny 3-pod units to floor-standing towers.
- A 6-to-9-plant garden suits most households well.
- AeroGarden has been wound down by Scotts Miracle-Gro through 2026 — stock may be on clearance.
- Click and Grow, Rise Gardens, Lettuce Grow, and value brands continue to sell systems.

WATCH OUT

Before you buy any garden, check that its seed pods and plant food are still readily available. A garden is only as useful as its supply of refills, and a discontinued brand with no more pods becomes an expensive paperweight.

6 Pods, Seeds, and the Question of Refills

Most counter-top gardens use seed pods: little pre-planted capsules you simply drop into the slots. They are foolproof and convenient, which is wonderful for a beginner — you cannot really get the planting wrong. The catch is that branded pods are an ongoing cost, and if the brand stops making them, you are stuck. This is exactly why the supply question above matters so much.

The good news is that most gardens also accept grow-your-own pods: reusable baskets you fill with a growing sponge and your own seeds from any seed packet. This is cheaper, opens up far more plant varieties, and frees you from depending on one company's pods. Many folks start with the easy branded pods, then graduate to their own seeds once they are comfortable and want more choice and lower cost.

Pod type	The trade-off
Branded seed pods	Foolproof and easy; ongoing cost, tied to the brand
Reusable grow-your-own pods	Cheaper, any seeds you like; a little more effort
Starting from your own seed packets	Widest variety and lowest cost; best once you have the hang of it

WATCH OUT

Buying a set of reusable pods and a bag of growing sponges early on is a small expense that pays off fast. It lets you plant any seeds from the garden center and never leaves you at the mercy of one brand's pod supply.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

7 Setting One Up, Step by Step

Setting up a counter-top garden is a pleasant half-hour, not a project. Pick a spot with an outlet nearby and away from a drafty door or a heat vent. Assemble the base and the light arm following the simple instructions, then place your seed pods in the slots and set the little clear domes over them if the garden includes them, which hold in humidity while the seeds sprout.

Fill the tank with water to the marked line, add the measured plant food, and switch it on. The light will come on and begin its daily cycle, and within days you should see the first green shoots. From there, the garden largely runs itself — your part is topping up water and adding food when prompted. Take the setup slowly, read each step, and you truly cannot get it wrong.

1. Choose a spot near an outlet, away from drafts and heat vents.
2. Assemble the base and light arm per the instructions.
3. Place the seed pods in the slots and add any humidity domes.
4. Fill the tank to the line, add the measured plant food, and switch it on.

GOOD TO KNOW

Remove the little clear humidity domes once the seeds have sprouted and the seedlings start to touch them. The domes help seeds germinate, but once the plants are up and growing, they want open air and the full light.

8 The Light: Your Indoor Sun

The grow light is the heart of the garden, standing in for sunlight, and a couple of things about it are worth understanding. Most gardens run the light on an automatic timer, commonly around fourteen to sixteen hours a day, which is more than natural daylight in winter and part of why indoor plants grow so fast. You generally leave the timer on its default and let it do its job.

As the plants grow taller, the light arm usually raises to stay a comfortable distance above them — keep it a few inches above the tops so the plants get strong light without the tallest leaves touching the bulb. The light is bright by design; it is fine to be around, but you may want to position the garden where that bright glow at night does not bother you in an adjacent room. Modern grow lights are LED and sip very little electricity, so running them all day costs little.

- The light runs on an automatic timer, often 14 to 16 hours a day.
- Leave it on the default schedule unless the maker advises otherwise.
- Raise the light arm as plants grow, keeping it a few inches above them.
- LED grow lights use little electricity, so running them all day is cheap.

WATCH OUT

If the bright light at night bothers you or a nearby room, place the garden where a door can be closed, or pick a model whose timer you can shift so its 'day' matches yours. You do not have to live with a glow in the hallway all evening.

9 Feeding, Watering, and Routine Care

The ongoing care of a counter-top garden is refreshingly light, and most gardens hold your hand through it. The two regular jobs are keeping the tank topped up with water as the plants drink it down, and adding the measured plant food on the schedule the garden prompts — usually every week or two. Use the plant food made for hydroponics; ordinary garden fertilizer is not the same and can harm the plants or clog the system.

Beyond that, a little tending keeps the garden happy and productive. Harvest regularly by snipping leaves and stems, which actually encourages the plants to grow bushier. Trim away any yellowing leaves, and give the plants a gentle thinning if they crowd each other. Every so often, when you replant, it is worth emptying and wiping out the tank to keep it clean. None of it is demanding — a few minutes here and there.

1. Top up the tank with water as the plants drink it down.
2. Add the hydroponic plant food when the garden prompts you, usually every week or two.
3. Harvest often by snipping leaves — it makes plants grow bushier.
4. Clean the tank when you replant, and trim any yellowing leaves.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Use only plant food made for hydroponics, measured as directed. Ordinary soil fertilizer, or too much of any food, can burn the roots or foul the water. More is not better here — follow the garden's own feeding guidance.

10 When Something Goes Wrong

Counter-top gardens are forgiving, but a few things do go sideways, and nearly all have simple causes. Plants that grow tall, pale, and spindly are usually reaching for more light — lower the light closer, or check that the timer is actually running. Slow or stunted growth often means the plant food has run low or the water got too low, both easy to correct. And seeds that never sprout are sometimes just old, or were kept too cool or dry during germination.

Two other common troubles: slimy or smelly water means the tank needs emptying and cleaning, often because food built up or the pump stopped circulating. And algae — a green film on the water or pods — is usually from too much light hitting the water directly; keeping the tank covered and not overfeeding keeps it in check. Work through the simple causes before deciding anything is seriously wrong.

The trouble	The usual cause and fix
Tall, pale, spindly plants	Not enough light — lower the light or check the timer
Slow or stunted growth	Low plant food or low water — top both up
Seeds never sprout	Old seeds or too cool and dry — try fresh pods, keep warm
Slimy, smelly water or algae	Clean the tank, keep it covered, do not overfeed

GOOD TO KNOW

Most garden troubles come down to light, water, or food — the same three things the plants need. Run through those in order and you will solve the great majority of problems without any special knowledge.

11 What It Costs to Run

Folks often wonder whether an indoor garden is expensive to own, and the honest answer is that it is modest. The garden itself is a one-time purchase, ranging from the price of a nice dinner out for a small unit to a few hundred dollars for a large one. After that, the running costs are small: the electricity for an efficient LED light is only a few dollars a month, and the main ongoing expense is plant food and, if you use them, branded pods.

Whether it 'pays for itself' depends on how you count. If you buy a lot of fresh herbs, which are expensive and wilt fast at the store, a garden can genuinely save money while giving you far fresher basil and parsley on demand. But most people are not really in it for the savings — they are in it for the fresh taste, the winter greenery, and the simple satisfaction of growing, which is worth plenty on its own.

> *Few people buy an indoor garden to save money, and most end up glad they did anyway — for the fresh basil in February and the small daily joy of watching something grow.*

12 Recap

An indoor hydroponic garden brings fresh herbs and greens to your counter all year, with no soil, no yard, and very little fuss. The plants grow in nutrient water under a built-in light, and the machine prompts you through the simple routine of adding water and food. Start with herbs, pick a garden whose pods are easy to buy, give the plants light-water-food, and you will be snipping fresh basil within weeks.

- Grows herbs and greens in water under a light — clean, fast, and year-round.
- Start with basil and lettuce; skip big root crops and sprawling plants.
- Check that pods and plant food are easy to buy before choosing a brand.
- Most troubles trace to light, water, or food — check those first.

GOOD TO KNOW

Last verified November 2026. The hydroponics market shifts — as of November 2026 AeroGarden had been wound down by Scotts Miracle-Gro, while Click and Grow, Rise Gardens, Lettuce Grow, and value brands continued selling; always confirm a brand is still supported and stocks pods before buying. For help choosing or setting one up, call Bill at (330) 200-8042.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Clip this to the fridge. It is the quick answer to the indoor-garden questions that come up most.

I want to…	Do this…
Start easily	Begin with herbs, especially basil — fast and rewarding
Pick a garden	Choose a 6-to-9-pod unit whose pods are easy to buy
Avoid being stuck for refills	Check that seed pods and plant food are readily available
Set it up	Add pods, fill the tank, add plant food, switch on the light
Feed it right	Use only hydroponic plant food, measured as directed
Fix pale, spindly plants	Lower the light and check the timer is running
Clear slimy water or algae	Empty and clean the tank, keep it covered, do not overfeed
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

Call or text (330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.