

CULTIVATING CATNIP

Grow your own treats for kittleh

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Catnip is to felines what rich chocolate and a good wine are to us humans. Sure, we don't need chocolate and wine to survive, but isn't life much more pleasant because of it? Which is why we should show some love to kitty and take the extra step to grow fresh, organic catnip. Like homegrown tomatoes, the homegrown herb just tastes better, and it's relatively easy to grow.

1 Pick up seeds or plantings at your local garden store and find a sunny location. Direct sunlight and heat make for hardy, fast-growing catnip.



2 Plant in small containers in the house or in larger batches in the garden. And use compost in the soil. "The key to good catnip is compost, compost, compost," says Cynthia Bullock, who grows catnip for a non-profit organization, Harley's Hope Foundation, which assists low-income pet owners when medical issues arise.



3 Arrange some sort of cage or netting around the plant so that cats can't help themselves to the treat any time they like.

4 Water, but not too much. "It is possible to overwater catnip, which makes it moldy, so always err on the side of drier, well-drained soil," says Bullock. She has some plants that do very well growing on the outside of her house near the dryer vent.



5 Harvest in four to six weeks or when the stems are about 12 inches long. You may harvest sooner and share a fresh leaf with kitty, but the drying process requires a long stem to tie the bundle.

6 Dry the leaves at room temperature in absolute darkness for four to six weeks, recommends Bullock. When fully dried, the leaves can be crumbled in food or put in a little cloth bag for cats to play with.