

Absolute Beginner's Guide to Growing Your Own Aloe Vera

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Published on December 9, 2015, Last Updated on December 22, 2015



The aloe vera plant has become incredibly popular. It's a very easy plant to care for, making it a staple in many homes. A large part of aloe vera's popularity can be attributed to the fact that it boasts a wide range of natural health properties. These versatile plants are known for their ability to thrive under virtually any conditions, as they grow equally well indoors and outdoors with minimal care. Scientifically named *aloe barbadensis miller*, it's one of the best plants for someone who is new to gardening or interested in growing their own super foods!

Today, I'll walk through what you need to know about growing your own aloe vera. We will also share some of the things you should watch out for as you care for your plant. No matter how small the plant may be when you first bring your aloe vera home, there is a lot to look forward to. The plant is well known for its quick leaf multiplication and for mothering plantlets known as 'babies' that can be removed to yield entirely new plants. This means that once your plant reaches maturity, you will be able to harvest aloe vera leaves continuously.

Traditionally, aloe is known for its topical benefits, including wound healing and keeping the skin moisturized and protected. ^[1] It's been used in numerous beauty products as an additive for its vitamin and acemannan content; however, its [nutritional properties](#) also make this plant a living superfood. Now let's learn how to grow your own!

Growing Your Own Aloe Vera

When you first get started with growing your own aloe vera, the most important things to consider are the soil and location of the plant. First, decide where you will be growing your aloe vera. Whether indoors or outdoors, it is imperative that you choose a place where your plant will receive plenty of light. This can be a little tricky, though, because too much direct sunlight can cause the plant to dry out and turn the leaves brown – but too little light will stunt the plant's growth. It is also important to note that aloe can freeze in the winter if outside, so keep your local climate in mind when choosing where you want to place your plant. I recommend choosing a pot you can easily bring indoors during freezes or leaving your plant in a location you can cover with a tarp or blanket. If the plant is to be grown indoors, make sure the plant will receive enough indirect sunlight; south or west-facing windows are ideal.

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Once you've decided where your aloe vera is going to live, it's time to begin thinking about the soil. Aloe vera likes dry soil, so I recommend using cactus potting soil mix. The best alternative would be to use a regular potting soil with perlite added. When planting your aloe vera, make sure to position the plant so it is upright, and cover the base and roots with the soil. Provide several inches of space between plants, as they do grow outward from the center. Give your aloe vera a bit of space because the mother plant will offset the "babies" from the outer base.

It's also important to choose an appropriate planter. Start with a medium to large planter and make sure it has good drainage. Planters with a single large hole in the bottom are best, as your plant will not grow if there is standing water. In fact, one of the most common issues new plant owners run into when trying to care for aloe vera is that they overwater the plant. When watering, the soil should feel damp but not soaked. The best way to gauge watering is to feel the plant leaves every few days, as long as they feel cool or moist, the plant has enough water. If the leaves feel dry or brittle, first examine the sunlight conditions, then adjust water as needed. Before you water again, the soil should be completely dry. During cooler months, it will need less water.

Harvesting Leaves from Your Aloe Vera Plant



Once your plant reaches maturity, you can begin to harvest aloe for its nutritional benefits. It's safe to begin this process once additional leaves or shoots have grown from the center of the plant. To harvest leaves from your aloe vera, start by selecting mature leaves from the outermost section of the plant. Cut them from as close to the base as possible, but be mindful not to disturb the roots. Because it's a living decoration, I would suggest selecting plant leaves that will not reduce the plant's aesthetics.

The plantlets or "babies" your aloe produces can easily be removed by carefully uprooting them, detaching from the parent, and re-planting on their own. These mini plants make great gifts. It's not uncommon for aloe plants to repopulate exponentially, so there's a good chance that you will have plenty of aloe before you know it!

Additional Considerations for Your Aloe Plant

Caring for your aloe vera plant is not difficult. There are, however, a few considerations to keep in mind:

- Aloe does not need to be fertilized. If you want to, or think it needs a little extra food, use a phosphorus-heavy, water-based fertilizer at half-strength.
- If the leaves become thin and curled, it needs more water.
- Aloe vera leaves grow upward from the base. If the leaves droop or lie flat, it probably needs more sunlight.

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- Your plant will grow towards the sun, if in a pot, rotate as needed to keep the plant leaves upright.

If your aloe grows slowly, here are a few common issues to check:

- The soil is too alkaline. This can be corrected by adding a bit of soil sulfur.
- The plant has too much water, the soil is too damp, or it holds too much water. This can be corrected by modifying the amount of water added to the plant.
- It needs more sunlight. This can be remedied with a simple change of scenery.
- It has too much fertilizer. In this scenario, you can simply repot the plant with more soil.
- The plant needs a bigger pot for its roots. Eventually, all healthy aloe vera plants will probably reach this point.

Things to Watch Out For

Like any plant, aloe vera can suffer from bugs, disease and fungus on its stem or roots. Mealybugs and scale, which are small, flat tan or brown bugs that suck the sap from aloe, are the most common insect problems. You should also be mindful of leaf rot, as this is a common ailment for aloe.

To avoid fungus, keep the soil and plant dry. You can protect your aloe vera plant from pests with a natural pesticide. Look for an organic pesticide instead of one that is toxic. You can even [make your own safe, organic pesticide](#) at home. Fortunately, because of aloe vera's ideal growing conditions, fungus is not a common problem.

Be sure to protect yourself too. Young aloe vera plants have soft spikes on their leaves that won't do much damage but the spikes of older, more established plants can prick you good if you're not careful. These spikes are capable of tearing clothes and even puncturing the skin. Be mindful when repotting or harvesting and wear gloves when handling.

Getting Something in Return from Your Aloe Vera Plant



The aloe vera plant isn't all about looking good and adding beauty to your home. Many people enjoy the many uses of the aloe vera plant. One of the most common is using aloe vera's inner leaf gel as a topical remedy for burns and sunburns, cuts, and other skin irritations. [2] This inner-leaf gel can also be consumed for collagen support, as a digestive aid, its immune supporting properties, and many other superfood benefits.

Supplementing Your Diet with Aloe Vera

To get the most out of your aloe vera plant, properly caring for your plant and harvesting the leaves the right way are crucial. And, it should be noted that inner leaf gel can be stored in the refrigerator for a day or two, however it is not the best on-the-go food. Some people find the taste to be slightly bitter so it's often consumed in smoothies. Just be careful to avoid the outer leaf because it contains aloin, which can act as a harsh laxative. The aloin, taste, and short storage life make [aloe supplementation](#) a great alternative to consuming raw aloe.

Aloe has been used around the world for centuries as nutritional supplementation and topical use. It's a natural source of vitamins, minerals, trace elements, and enzymes; all of which support healthy immune function, soothe and cleanse the digestive tract, and support the circulatory system.

Do you have tips for growing aloe vera or consuming it? Take a moment to leave a comment below and share your experience with all of us.

References:

1. Amar Surjushe, Resham Vasani and D G Saple. [Aloe Vera: A Short Review](#). Indian J Dermatol. 2008; 53(4): 163-166.
2. Feily A, Namazi MR. [Aloe Vera in Dermatology: A Brief Review](#). G Ital Dermatol Venereol. 2009 Feb;144(1):85-91