

Growing tubes can increase space for plants

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Transportable growing tubes may help vegetable growers with limited space.

Whirligro, created in the United Kingdom by Iain Findlay, uses spiral tubes to increase crop yield by three-fold, able to support 30 plants in a 1-square-meter area. The Whirligro system simplifies small-space farming of herbs, flowers and vegetables. The design suspends plants in the air through a helix pattern, which triples the yield size of each square meter, Findlay said.

Growers can use the Whirligro container to produce veggies and herbs free of chemicals, Findlay said. Since the plants are supported off the ground, typical garden pests like slugs have no means of invasion.

There is a downside to Whirligro containers: Findlay struggles with packaging. The helix model makes shipping costs high, so distribution is challenging. Findlay hopes the allure of the product will overshadow the extra costs of delivery.

"Vertical growing is all the rage, and looks certain to play a major part in food production in the future," he said. "I've had expressions of interest from about fifteen countries around the world."



Three-week-old basil plants. Basil grown traditionally, right, and basil grown in the Volksgarden, left.

The original Whirligro gardening structure is priced at \$128, plus international shipping costs. Since Whirligro's inception, more designs have spun off from the original model.

The Whirligro Maxi is a large-scale version, providing more plant space.

The planters can be reused and are portable.

Omega Garden, a Qualicum Beach,

Canada, company focused on cylindrical containers, offers the Volksgarden, a stackable, rotating garden cylinder that resembles a Ferris wheel – which grows up to 80 plants in a 4-foot-square area. The shape and moving design doesn't require watering, keeps plants off the ground and promotes strong and fast growth, according to Omega Garden. On a larger scale, the company offers the Carousel, equaling as much as 1,500 square feet of greenhouse yet using 150 square feet of floor space.

"The plants are on an exercise treadmill," said Edward Marchildon, owner of Omega Garden.

Marchildon observed two-day-old plants, one that grew in the Volksgarden and one that grew traditionally. What he found was that the rotation made the plants grow more.

"It was like Bambi meets Godzilla," he said.

Volksgardens have a \$2,000 price tag and cost about \$200 to ship.

Farmers can rest easy after they set up a Volksgarden, Marchildon said. A plumbing-free water supply at the base of the system hydrates plants as they rotate. The systems also don't require direct sunlight and come with a fluorescent light bulb connection that has a 20-year lifespan. **VGN**