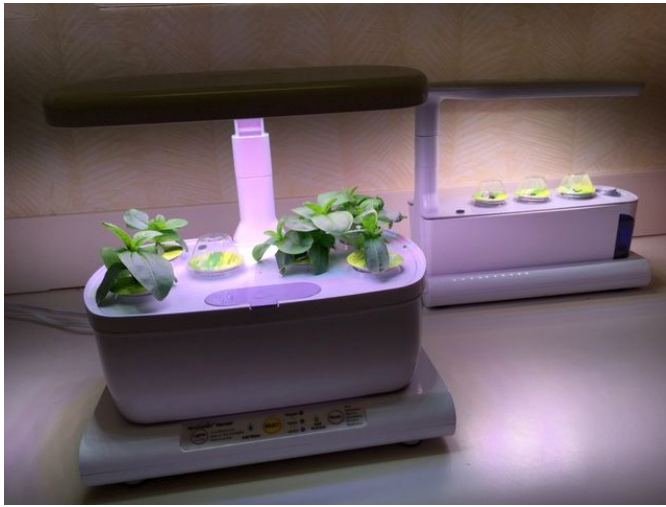


Inside Gardens



I've always enjoyed gardening. Nothing too fancy, a few flowers, herbs, and the occasional tomato or pepper plant. This is a tradition that was passed down to me by my mother. I remember her planting a classic Italian garden of plum tomatoes, basil, and green peppers in

the postage stamp strip of grass in back of her home in Flushing, New York.

She would dutifully tend to it every morning during the spring and summer months and the produce she'd somehow manage to coax from it was nothing short of astonishing! There was always fresh Italian tomatoes for salads or to put on sandwiches and just enough to make a small batch of fresh sauce which was seasoned by an abundance of fresh basil.

These days, I don't have much of a yard for planting or the desire to spend much time out in the intense South Florida heat. That's why I was so excited to discover the Aerogarden! I purchased mine [online](#), but you can also find them in the big box retail stores like Costco and Walmart. They're manufactured by Mircale-Gro, the company that makes plant fertilizer.



I started out planting herbs: basil, oregano, and Italian parsley. All ready for pizza! They were really easy to set up and the only tricky thing is figuring out the timers. I think the main problem will always be in the timer that controls when the grow light turns on and off. They should

be on 14 or 18 hours and off 8 or 6 hours.

Since I go to bed early, I have to rely on my husband, George, to tell me what time the lights went off. That's fun because he'll say, "I think they went off at 11 or maybe it was 10 or 10:30." One of the Aerogardens has a timer that is going off and on at crazy times. I wrote to the company about it and they replaced free of charge with no additional shipping charge.

When there is an inch growth under the domes, you remove the domes and adjust the height of the lights as the plants grow. It's so much fun to watch the growth and of course, harvesting the fruits of your labor. In fact, everything is growing so rapidly that I can't keep up with it. Since the growth is so full, the garden needs water every day, even sometimes twice a day. At this point, I could probably use an [interior plant maintenance company](#) to come in on a regular basis and take care of my gardens for me!

I even planted some tomatoes which you can see in the photo below. They were delicious, but very small and I wound up removing them.



I had some extra herb pods leftover so I planted those in its place (dill, savory, and Genovese basil). That was in the three pod planter. As for the six pod garden, it has gotten so overgrown that I can't keep up with it. I have so much basil frozen and now I'm even trying to freeze the coriander. I think I might remove all six and just plant flowers and then I would have some pretty flowers on my utility room counter.

I never thought I would have such prolific growth! Coriander is so hard to keep when you buy it in the grocery store and I didn't expect that it would grow as fully as basil. It's so fresh tasting and goes great in eggs and salsa or any Mexican dish.

I planted flowers (zinnias) in my larger aerogarden as I couldn't keep up with the herbs. I could open a herb shop! In my smaller garden I started a new herb growth, basil, oregano, and parsley. I'm sure I'll end up putting flowers in that one also. Whenever we have company they go right to my Aerogarden. It's such a big attraction!

Home Selling or Buying Requires Work – part 2

In today's housing market being the Buyer is the best of both worlds. The cards are all stacked in your favor. You can choose the best realty agency in your neighborhood and interview the agent you want to work with. You can determine the time and places you would like to visit as well as being firm on the price range you will pay. Don't hesitate to ask all and every question that is of utmost importance to you, such as location and types of schools in the area, what the house originally sold for, taxes, maintenance expenses, association fees, all improvements done on the house, etc.

Being the Seller is a whole different bag. You have your work cut out for you even before you sign a contract with a realty agency. So let's go through these step by step:

- 1) Be prepared to accept that the value of your home is likely to be below what you think it is worth or what you think you can get for it.
- 2) Make sure your agent knows the lowest price you're willing to accept.
- 3) Study the comparables in your area and read the latest housing trends.
- 4) Pick the realty agency you feel will meet your needs and has a good track record in selling homes in your area.
- 5) Interview an agent from that office and make sure you can work comfortably with him or her.
- 6) Let your agent know how you want your showings

scheduled. However, be flexible.

7) Be prepared in advance for a showing by doing the following:

- Unclutter: remove all family and personal photos, toys off floors and neatly stored away; magazines and newspapers out of site, arrange books neatly in book cases or stacked neatly, or put in cabinets, remove religious items as not to offend any religion; remove items that show a political preference.



- Closets: Neatly hang and arrange clothes, organize shoes, handbags, belts, ties, etc. Now is the time to donate your unused, non-fitting clothes to charity. Make closet space appear larger.
- Linens and towels should be neatly folded and arranged on shelves or drawers (imagine a store display).
- Carpets, floors, tiles cleaned. Remove loose carpeting that could be tripped over.
- Bathrooms sparkling and counter tops cleared off.



- Basement: if storing in basement arrange items neatly and put in containers or plastic cartons.
- Clean or repaint if there is staining, mildew, or signs of aging. Recaulk where needed.
- Open windows, air out house and turn on ceiling fans if

you have any. A light spray of a room deodorizer is alright, just don't overdo. Fresh baked cookies give a homey touch.

- Outdoors: clear grounds of all fallen tree limbs, rake leaves, keep pathways swept, grass mowed/snow shoveled, hedges and flower beds trimmed and mulched. Fresh mulch is always impressive. Power wash or touch up mildew or mold. Lysol Mildew and Mold Remover spray works very well.



- Once a showing is scheduled, be prepared to leave the premises, take your pets with you, remove any signs of pets on the premises i.e. food dishes, litter boxes, pet toys and beds, vacuum/remove any animal hair (people with allergies will be very appreciative).

You are now on your way to selling your home. Good luck. Stay calm even when the offer is not what you expected!

[Selling a House Today – part 1](#)



It's been quite a while since I posted on my Blog and it is mainly due to the fact I have been busy trying to sell our homes, one in Ohio, and our home in Florida. My husband George and I, now in

our senior years, have decided to plan our retirement years in a smaller dwelling and one free of "stuff". For many out there it must seem like such a luxury to have two homes. Yes, it may seem that way in today's economic environment, but after many years of dedicating our lives to working and raising children, having a second home was more than just a luxury. It was something we worked towards to enjoy our retirement with family and friends.

It didn't take long for us to realize that planning vacations and time with our grown children and grandchildren was not as easy as it appears. Adult children have their own life and work schedules, their children have school and may live far away, so those times together are limited and were not as frequent as we thought. So we changed our outlook and want to simplify our life with less space and clutter. However, there will always be a guest room available.

Downsizing was the way to go. So here we go, trying to sell two houses in the worst housing market ever. It is an eye-opener with many lessons to be learned.

In our 50 years of marriage we have moved several times mainly due to career requirements, and prior to 2005 the real estate market was very favorable for the Seller. In our past moves we have worked with many real estate agents and learned the process of selling or buying a home.

In those days you didn't object if the Seller was in the home at the time you were viewing the house or if there were children or pets in the house. Whoever thought that family or personal photos were not to be seen? And thank goodness it wasn't proper to mention you smelled any household odors.

It's a whole different bag today. It is definitely a Buyer's market and the poor Seller must meet the demands of realtors today. They will insist you remove yourself, your children and even your pets from the premises when showing your home. Not

to mention, that you don't spray, put out incense, or anything to make the buyer think you are masking any "odors". But it would be nice if you baked a batch of chocolate chip cookies before they arrive. Sure, as if they didn't know that is a set-up aroma to make you think "doesn't this house smell homey"?

We have been going through this experience as a Seller and a Buyer and believe me it ain't fun. In my next post I will provide you with some tips that will make this experience a lot easier for you.

Essential Kitchen Gadgets



Have you checked lately how many kitchen gadgets you possess and how many you really use? Hello!

I never gave this much thought until I viewed Christopher Lowell's latest *Ask Christopher* innovation on [Too Many Gadgets](#). I have kitchen drawers filled with many gadgets that I probably can open a kitchen gadget store. Thanks to Mr. Lowell, I plan to become a more efficient cook in my kitchen.

Christopher Lowell, an interior designer and celebrity, who has received Emmy awards and accolades for his television shows now shares his decorating and home improvement ideas online. Through the new technology of mobile social media we can now view six-minute videos of unique ideas on lifestyle topics only the way Christopher can do it. He blends comedy

with his creative advice in an informative and fun format.

In the video *Too Many Gadgets*, he shows us how we have overstocked our kitchen with useless items which do nothing but take up space. I was so impressed by his demonstration of the microplane zester, something I have, and never quite grasp the proper usage. I have been zesting lemons and grating garlic to test CL's method. It works great!

Christopher will post a new video weekly. Aside from the *Too Many Gadgets* video he has posted five other very informative demonstrations on [home design](#). You can even sign up as a member and submit a question to Christopher. His website offers many options to learn about [design and décor](#) plus an insight into his personal thoughts on life.

Right now, I am going to rearrange my kitchen drawers and give my gadgets a new grade.

[Christmas Gift Books for the Cook](#)



Need some suggestions for a gift to a family member who loves to cook, or for that special friend who has everything, well, how about a good cookbook? I am always blown away by the huge selections of cookbooks available in the bookstores or online. It would take me days to go through all of them before I found the one that I feel will meet my needs. Today's cookbooks are so well photographed and sometimes that alone would draw a novice to make a purchase only to find the recipes are not easy to follow.

When purchasing for a gift be sensitive to the person's cooking capabilities. There are also excellent "coffee table" cookbooks on the market that are enjoyable to read. However, a helpful cookbook, with photographs or not, is one you will use over and over again. Some of mine are so overused that I had to replace them with new copies. I even purchase revised editions of a favorite book. The books that I recommend for gift giving cannot only be purchased at your favorite bookstore, but also online and downloaded to an e-reader. Maybe you will find one from my list to give as a gift or purchase for yourself:

1. ***Joy of Cooking*** (The All New All Purpose) – Irma S. Rombauer, Becker and Becker. The first revised edition was published in 1953. There have been many revisions of this edition to meet the needs of changing public tastes. I refer to this book as my Bible Cookbook. I use it constantly and whenever searching for a recipe I can always find it in *Joy of Cooking*. There are no photographs but a few drawings to illustrate techniques in preparing a recipe. The recipes are easy to follow for a beginner and will also please the gourmet chef. This is my #1 suggestion. A must in everyone's collection!
2. ***The Thousand Recipe Chinese Cookbook*** – Gloria Bley Miller. This is an excellent book for cooks interested in Chinese recipes. Every Chinese dish you can imagine can be found in this book. Techniques in preparing the food, variations of regional differences in preparation and ingredients, and easy to follow directions. A great book!
3. ***Mastering the Art of French Cooking*** – Julia Childs et al. I recommend this book for collectors, experienced cooks and lovers of French cuisine. A classic!
4. ***The Food Processor Bible*** – Norene Gilletz. Many cooks love using their food processor but are limited as to recipes, techniques, and the usage of the different

blades. Easy to follow instructions and excellent selection of recipes. A valuable book!

5. ***American Wholefoods Cuisine*** – Nikki & David Goldbeck. This book was first published in 1983 and is an excellent cookbook for those interested in good health, organic foods and vegetarian recipes. No illustrations, easy to follow instructions, and ingredients that are easy to find. Very informative book!
6. ***Weight Watchers New Complete Cookbook*** – Weight Watchers. I have found all Weight Watcher cookbooks are excellent for dieters and non-dieters. Great illustrations, portion sizes for small servings, healthful cooking techniques, and ingredients make this book an excellent Weight Watcher edition. Book has a spiral cover making it convenient to lay flat when reading a recipe. Any person on a diet would love this book!
7. ***Rocco's Italian American*** – by Rocco DiSpirito. Mr. DiSpirito is a chef who owns two restaurants and had a TV reality show, *The Restaurant*. He features many of the Italian recipes he grew up with and some of his Mama's favorites. I found these Italian recipes to be easy to follow and typical rustic Italian cooking. The stories of his youth and family, plus the illustrations, make this a very enjoyable book along with easy and delicious recipes. Don't miss this one!
8. ***Now Eat This*** – Rocco DiSpirito. In this cookbook Rocco has converted delicious and popular comfort dishes into healthy lower fat and lower calorie recipes. Easy to follow and ingredients can be found in any grocery store. Each recipe includes a Fat count before and after. Beautiful photographs and in paperback edition. A dieter's delight!
9. ***Cooking with My Sisters*** – Adriana Trigiani. Fans of Ms. Trigiani novels and Italian cooking will enjoy this book. Adriana writes about her family and the memories she and her sisters shared in growing up in an Italian household. Each delicious and beautifully photographed

recipe has a story included plus comments from the sisters. It's a collection of her family recipes collected over the generations. Not just a cookbook but filled with delightful stories. A book to consider!

10. ***How easy is that?*** – Barefoot Contessa (Ina Garten). Who doesn't know the Barefoot Contessa from the Food Network? This is her latest book and made the top best seller list shortly after its release date. It's beautifully photographed and the recipes are easy as the Contessa promised. I put this in the coffee table category and one that everyone will pick up to read. Good recipes!

Well, I hope my choices for gift giving have been helpful. I wish you a Merry Christmas and may the New Year bring you much happiness, fun shopping, and good eats.