



The containers' 320 square feet are enough to grow more than 4,000 heads of organic lettuce | Photo source [Natural Grocers](#)

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VEGETABLES GROWN IN THE GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT



A US grocer chain has begun to grow its own vegetables hydroponically - in a shipping container in the store parking lot

Spotted: The locavore movement has been gaining pace in recent years, as consumers and businesses seek to create more self-reliant and resilient food networks by eating locally. However, eating locally can be very difficult in big cities. US grocery chain Natural Grocers has come up with one solution using a GardenBox — a shipping container that houses a vertical planting system filled with fresh produce.

The GardenBox is located in the stores' parking lot and is used to grow food hydroponically. The containers' 320 square feet are enough to grow more than 4,000 heads of organic lettuce – which normally take an entire acre of land to grow. And all just 82 steps from the store shelves. The plants are harvested and sold with their roots intact, which keeps them fresher for longer.

The produce in the container is grown using water and organic nutrients, and can be grown year-round. Around 700 to 800 organic seeds planted each week in natural peat and coconut husk. After a few weeks, the seedlings are transferred to vertical grow walls that use LED light. The lettuce is ready for harvest at about eight weeks. The feeding and watering are automated, and the system also keeps track of air temperature, humidity and pH levels – emailing the human gardeners when there is a problem.

According to Michael Boardman, manager of the grow unit, the boxes are also an excellent way to ensure that produce is fresh and of good quality year-round, saying, “We’re seeing consistency in the product, whether it’s snowing 2 feet outside or it’s 90 degrees outside. The box does a really good job of regulating this temperature.” He added that, “The taste is a really big selling point for me. You get a much stronger flavour out of all of them.”

In addition to growing food, shipping containers are being used in increasingly inventive ways. And it makes sense – the containers are easy to ship and a convenient size for a number of uses. At Springwise, we have seen them used in innovations as diverse as portable [mini-factories](#) and [luxury hotels](#).

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Takeaway:

The GardenBoxes are a way for stores to not only reduce their grow food miles with ultra-locally grown food, but to offer consumers fresher produce as well. The ability to offer out-of-season food without the need to fly it in from far-flung locations could also prove a big draw for some consumers. On top of this, hydroponic farming produces crops faster and saves more water than traditional farming. In the future, Natural Grocers hopes to bring GardenBox containers to more stores. Someday, all stores may have them.