



Dr. Drew Sinatra: Hello everyone, welcome to **Be HEALTHistic**. In today's **Wellness Wisdom Video Extra**, we're going to talk about a topic that I've gotten into lately, which is gardening. Especially in the past year or so, when unplugging from our devices and getting out into nature has been more important than ever. Gardening is a fantastic way to get outside, get your hands in the dirt, and grow your own plants, herbs, and vegetables.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: But what if you don't have a lot of outdoor space for a garden, or if you're an apartment dweller in a city? If that's the case, then hydroponic gardening maybe a good solution for you. Today I'm welcoming Suzanne Amoruso, a registered dietician, a certified diabetes educator, and a hydroponic gardening pro. Yay! She loves teaching people about healthy eating, and she has a special interest in integrative nutrition. Suzanne is going to give us a great overview about this type of gardening, and tell us the most important things we need to know to get started with our own hydroponic garden. Suzanne, thanks for joining us today.

Suzanne Amoruso: You're welcome, thank you.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: Well, you know what, this is going to be great because I've gardened before...not much, I'm very beginner. But I don't know much about this hydroponic gardening, and this whole tower garden thing. So as an introduction to our listeners here, can you tell us a little bit about what hydroponic gardening is, and also how you got into it?

Suzanne Amoruso: Absolutely. So learned about hydroponic, or they call it aeroponic gardening, because where I live in Virginia we have very clay soil, and I live in Lake of the Woods...it's a lake and a lot of woods. So it's really hard to grow a garden outside. So a friend of mine had this big tower in her backyard, and I said, "What is that?" And she had all these herbs and greens growing out of it. And my first question was, "Are those organic?" And she said, "Yeah, well you can buy organic seeds. You grow whatever you want." So I was pretty fascinated by this long, tall...it's made of a plastic, and there's 21 plants that go around. And the best part, it sounded like a waterfall. So the water comes up and down to water the plants. So I thought, "That is fascinating."

Suzanne Amoruso: You plug it in, so it doesn't use a lot of electric, but you plug in the...there's a, what do you call it? A timer, that goes to put the water on and off. And so I learned about it through my friend, and I went to a conference, I'm trying to remember if it was Orlando or Texas, a nutraceutical conference — where I actually heard Dr. David Katz speak. And the founder of the tower garden is Tim Blank. And you can Google him and how it was created and all that...and saw the tower gardens at this conference. And I talked to a New York City expert



named Stephen Ritz. He has started the tower gardens all over New York City, I don't know if you've ever heard of him. And he helps the children; they go into the school system and teach children how to garden by this hydroponic.

Suzanne Amoruso: So, as I saw the first tower garden and I purchased my own and started learning more, and was just so thrilled to grow basil and arugula, and you buy the organic seedlings. Yeah, I was just sharing it with lots of people. But when I saw them in rooftops, in restaurants, they're used a lot in New York City rooftops, and that airports use them. Chicago O'Hare, they have them and they use them. Very easy, simple way to grow a lot of volume. So you could grow 21 different plants, herbs, you can grow certain fruits that aren't too heavy. And very sustainable. So to use that in restaurants and the airport. So I thought, wow, that is just a...for me, because I like to garden, but where I live we just couldn't do it with the soil. So yeah, it really grows, it just uses water and a timer. So...

Dr. Drew Sinatra: So there's no soil involved?

Suzanne Amoruso: No soil. I brought a picture, I don't know if...you could see this, probably? Like, what it looks like?

Dr. Drew Sinatra: Yes.

Suzanne Amoruso: Right?

Dr. Drew Sinatra: It's beautiful looking.

Suzanne Amoruso: Right? In the bottom is 20 gallons of water, and the timer is set, and it sounds beautiful. So we use it for stress management, stress relaxation, as well as healthy gardening. So, you can grow a lot in a small space, so that's kind of the theme about it. You save water and you can grow a lot of volume indoors and out. And they have...

Dr. Drew Sinatra: I was going to ask you that. I mean, for those people that don't have an outside deck or a patio, who are living in an apartment, you can grow this using, I'm assuming, LED lights or something like that?

Suzanne Amoruso: That's right, they have grow lights. And they have two new tower gardens. One is called the FLEX and the home version, it's a little smaller. Same concept, you have the 20...no actually, the reservoir would be 10 or 15 gallon, a little smaller, yeah. So some of my friends in the Northern...Ohio, not Ohio...yeah, Chicago area and Illinois, I was going to say. They grow it in their base...so they'll grow it in the basement or, this sounds weird, but in the garage, which you have the grow lights. So they have it in the winter, so the lights keep it...they grow. And



then in the summer, like, now they take it outside and just take the lights, the grow lights off, and keep it outside. So it's great, yeah, indoors or out.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: And for those that don't have a green thumb, they've never gardened before, I mean, this is something that anyone listening could get involved in pretty quickly?

Suzanne Amoruso: Absolutely. That is a lot of the YouTube videos, you see people gardening with the tower gardens. And they all say, "I don't have a green thumb, never did. And this was easy, simple. And you don't need a green thumb to...you just follow the directions and how to set it up." And there's lots of videos to show you how to do it. And yeah, you can have a wonderful variety that you don't need to have a green thumb.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: And so you mentioned arugula, I think lettuce. What else grows really well in this tower garden?

Suzanne Amoruso: Spinach. I grew the best organic cucumbers I've ever had. So the cucumbers get heavy. So those go on the bottom, when you look at the bottom of the tower. Swiss chard. Let's see, I haven't done that great with broccoli. My best has been probably lettuce, arugula, cucumbers, tomatoes...my basil, I mentioned. What other herbs?

Dr. Drew Sinatra: I'm assuming kale would be grown really well in it.

Suzanne Amoruso: Absolutely. Yes, yeah, yeah, the dark greens. All the really...I mean, every vegetable's healthy, but to really get...you could actually grow, people have watermelon, but those are on the bottom, again, because they're heavy. So anything...squash, zucchini. Anything heavy and weighted will have to be at the bottom. And then it grows like...mine looked like a jungle, it looked like a jungle! It got so big, and the tomatoes. So I had to get like...they sell these other plastic, like, a tomato cage...kind of like a tomato cage, but you put it around, and everything hangs over. So they can kind of grow big, and out of control. But that means it's doing well.

Suzanne Amoruso: And the only thing you have to do, Drew, is check the water pH. So there's two solutions that they explain. It's minerals, just minerals, and they go in the bottom, in the water. You check it maybe every two weeks to make sure the pH is good. But if you see your vegetables growing and everything is flourishing, then you know that the water is fresh and the pH is good. So that's the only thing you have to...that's your green thumb, you have to know how to check the pH of the water. Yeah, and it's very simple.



Dr. Drew Sinatra: And what about trimming things? Or is there any sort of maintenance that's required as these are growing?

Suzanne Amoruso: Trimming...you just trim the lettuce off and eat it, basically.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: That's it.

Suzanne Amoruso: That's it.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: Simple.

Suzanne Amoruso: That's it, simple. I mean, kids can do it. If you have young kids, like you, young kids get involved. And people make it a whole family event, that you're teaching kids. I mean, my thing, too, as a dietician, you're teaching people...or I'm recommending fruits and vegetables, what a great way to grow your own and encourage kids to eat more. You cut the lettuce off, you put it in your salad, and there's our salad for dinner. You don't have to go to the store to get your good veggies.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: And really, for people starting off with this, I mean, it's not something that you can fail easily at. I mean, as long as you have the water, the pH is correct...

Suzanne Amoruso: That's right.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: ...I mean, these vegetables and fruits will grow.

Suzanne Amoruso: I mean, my husband, your cousin. My husband...

Dr. Drew Sinatra: Yeah, Richie.

Suzanne Amoruso: ...Richie was a skeptic. But yeah, it grew, and it got like a little too big. He told me to take it off the back deck. So now I have to move it to a different spot outside, because it gets big, yeah.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: Okay, okay. Well, as we wrap up here, is there any tips that you want to give our listeners for someone that's interested in doing this, has never done this before? What kind of tips do you have for them?

Suzanne Amoruso: I would say be patient, read the directions, there's a booklet it comes with. I don't like to read directions all the time, so I'll put a YouTube video on. You just have to do the steps, how to set it up. Let me think...yeah, there's a lot of little steps. Once it's set up it's easy, really, and it's fun. Probably a good tip when you're planting the seedlings, there's like a specific way they give you. They give



you everything in the kit, you get the rock wall...you can get your own seedlings. I have a good website, it's in Florida. It's called Organics, Growing Beyond Organic Seedlings. So I get some good seeds in from Florida. But you just want to follow those directions to how to plant the seeds. And you're keeping it moist, so you just keep it watered but like covering it, so it almost is like a greenhouse effect. So the seeds, they germinate. I mean, my seeds started growing. Three days you start seeing it grow.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: Wow.

Suzanne Amoruso: And then after two weeks you could take the...it's actually, if you look at some of the pictures, you take the rock wall, and it just goes in like a little plastic cage. And then you put it in the tower. So if you could see, I know you could probably see the little...it goes in these little compartments.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: Oh sure, yeah, those little compartments. Yeah.

Suzanne Amoruso: And that's where...and then it kind of looks like that, after it's in and it grows. So those little compartments go all around, and you just want to follow the steps, pretty specific how...you know, not how to plant the seeds, but kind of to the watering, of course, they're always watered. But covering it, I learned this year too, with like a little plastic but it's not fully covered so the sun comes in. It's kind of like a greenhouse effect. They grow really fast, really fast.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: Well, this is great, because I think we all would like to garden more. We all want to be able to grow our own food more. And this is something that you can have in your home, if you don't have a lot of space outdoors you can still grow it in your actual house, in your garage. Lots of different options here.

Suzanne Amoruso: Yes, yes.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: So thank you so much for coming on the show and describing what this hydroponic gardening tower is all about, because I think a lot of our listeners are going to be interested in this.

Suzanne Amoruso: You're very welcome, thank you so much for having me.

Dr. Drew Sinatra: Thanks for coming on the show.

Suzanne Amoruso: Okay, thank you.