Moreno Family Smoothie Recipe

1. Place fresh organic apple slices on the bottom your blender (we use a 1.5L Ninja).
2. Followed by frozen organic fruits (mixed berries, mangos are good).
3. Add a 150g pack of VertFarms YXE Smoothie Microgreens Mix.
4. Followed by a half cup of organic oat milk.
5. Blend together and enjoy!

VERTFARMS YXE: INSPIRED BY CHILDHOOD GARDENS & A NEW BABY

Photos supplied by VertFarms YXE

For Saskatoon's Lyman Moreno, starting his microgreens business VertFarms YXE at the height of the pandemic in 2020 was both an homage to his roots in the Philippines and a promise to his new baby boy.

"Growing up in the Philippines, greens were everywhere! I lived in a more rural community where agriculture was prominent, and it was easy to find greens. We could simply go into our backyard to get something that we wanted for dinner," Moreno recalled.

"I went to an agricultural school from elementary through to university. I had my own garden and grew plants since I was in Grade 4. It was a common thing for us to have our own gardens and grow greens. We were taught organic practices without knowing them as 'organic'. That's just how we grew things." he continued.

Moreno moved to Canada in 2007. Before starting VertFarms YXE, the 39-year-old newcomer worked for a company based out of Saskatoon's Innovation Place that designed and built indoor growing systems for vegetables, herbs, and cannabis. It was an experience that expanded his agricultural knowledge of how best to grow indoors. Fast forward to 2020, and Moreno and his wife welcomed a baby boy into their family.

"I wanted to feed my baby all the good foods, so I took my experience and started growing microgreens including broccoli and sunflower in trays at home," he recalled. "Once our baby was eating more solid foods, we started giving him smoothies with sunflower greens. He loved them! Sunflower greens are the best for smoothies, as they aren't as watery as other greens when blended. And you can really pack a lot of greens into a smoothie – half your blender can be greens. It was an easy way to give our baby the healthy food he needed."

Why microgreens?

"They are so nutrient dense compared to their mature counterparts. They really pack a punch and are full of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Different greens have different health benefits," Moreno said.

Moreno said in those early days, they tended to grow more greens than they could finish.

"We started giving away greens to our friends. Everyone loved them. So, I thought we could grow a bit more and sell them at a farmers' market."

And so, VertFarms YXE was born. Sourcing his seeds from Saskatchewan's Mumm's Sprouting Seeds (featured in the Spring 2017 issue of Abundance), Moreno moved his business out of his house into a building in Saskatoon's industrial area.

Unlike other Saskatchewan producers, Moreno's harvest comes quickly and repeatedly all year long. His microgreens are generally ready within five to nine days. First the seeds are sprinkled onto trays filled with Moreno's own soil mix and germinate within two to four days depending on the crop. Once germinated, the trays go under the lights for three to five days and then are good to harvest.

Moreno started selling his microgreens at The Community Farmers' Market of Saskatoon (located on 8th Street East in the parking lot in front of London Drugs), as well as online.

"When I'm at the farmers' market, I cut the greens fresh right there and sell them in a couple of different sizes. Some customers bring their own containers and I refill them."

He began with custom mixes of greens to give customers an idea of all he could offer. These included a Hearty Salad Mix (a combination of fava, peas, sunflower, and buckwheat microgreens) and a Sweet to Spicy Sampler Mix (from the sweetest popcorn, peas, sunflower, broccoli, and buckwheat on the mild side and radishes including daikon, triton, red, and ruby for the spice.)

"At the market, people always asked me, 'Are these organic?'" Moreno said. "I have always grown organically, but I wanted to have a way for people to know for sure. I worked with ECOCERT and went through the process of getting my organic certification starting in December of 2021 and was certified by the spring of 2022."

Moreno says being able to use the organic seal on his packaging and signage at the market has been great for business.

"The seal is an easy way to let people know that there is an urban farm in Saskatoon that produces high quality green products that are organic," Moreno said. "Instead of having to convince people, they see the seal."

One innovation that Moreno has introduced since starting his business is the No-Hassle Grow Kit.

"My customers were always telling me they tried growing microgreens at home and it never really worked – even if they were using kits, they could never get them to start properly. So, I decided to do one better and created a pre-generated grow kit," Moreno said.

The No-Hassle Grow Kits feature a crop of the customer's choosing, are started by Moreno in 10-inch by 10-inch trays, who then sells the kit to his customers.

"These trays mature in three to five days. You can then cut whatever you need and leave the rest still growing. This means my customers can eat the freshest microgreens whenever they like – self-serve style."

Beyond the mixes and grow kits, Moreno also sells microgreens individually: popcorn, buckwheat, sunflower, peas, broccoli, red radish, rainbow radish, and more. He is also doing some trials this winter with other greens, including two kinds of lettuce.

"My favourite is the growing part – the greens grow quite fast in a week. It still fascinates and excites me when I see greens that are an inch taller than the day before. You see something different every time you come in," Moreno said. "I always wanted to get back to farming; and my life's circumstances led me back to it. I love this."

Want to get your hands on some of Moreno's microgreens? Order them for delivery from his website or find them at several Asian grocers in Saskatoon including the Great Asian Market, Market of Asia, and the K Market. You'll also find his microgreens on the menus of a variety of Saskatoon restaurants including The Willows Golf & Country Club, the Home Quarter Coffeehouse & Bakery, Zervo's Tavern, Ayden, and Little Grouse.

VertFarms YXE

Saskatoon, SK

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