The windowsill notebook

A small guide to growing herbs in the light you already have.

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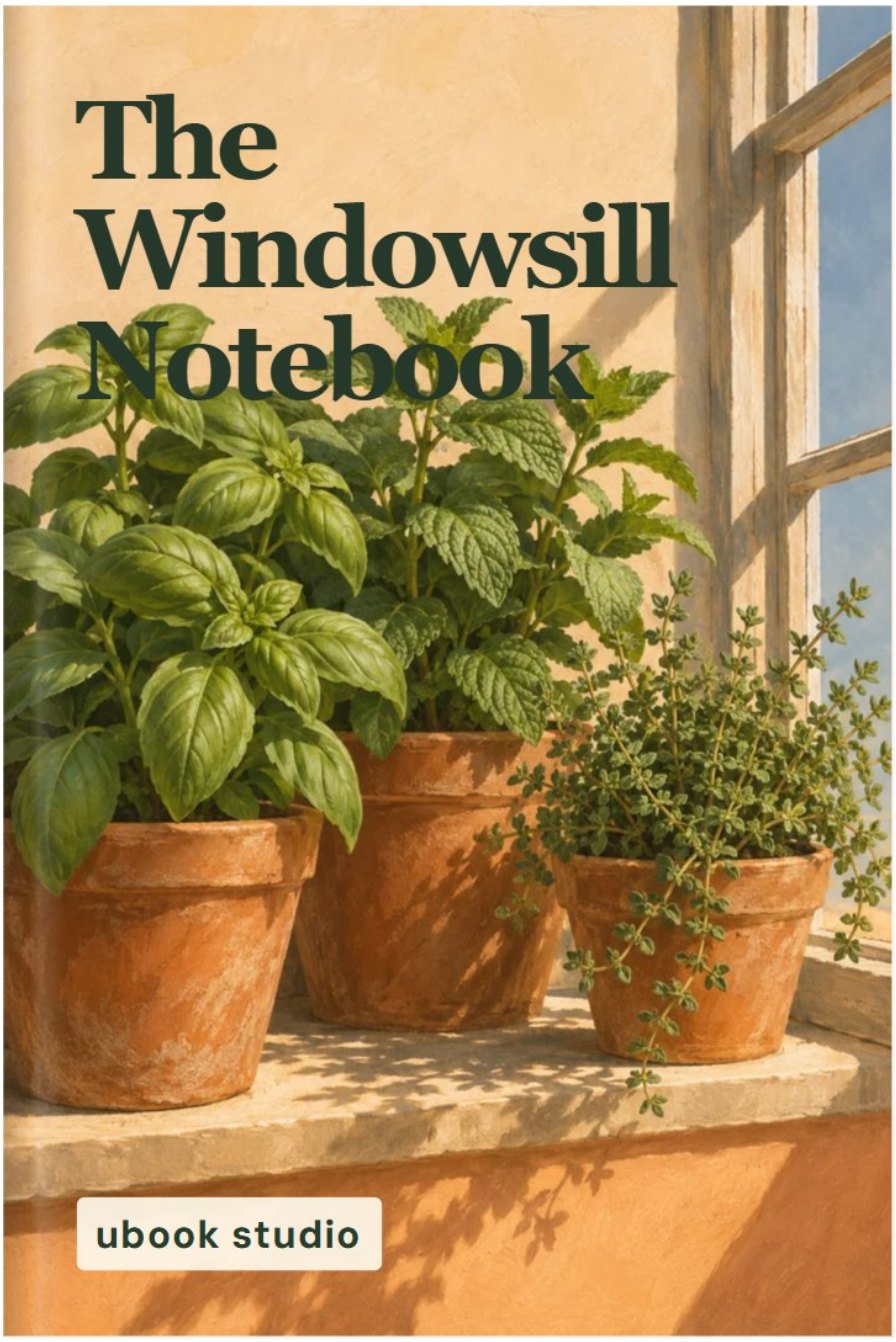

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Chapter 1

Read the light

On a day when you are home, set an empty pot on the sill. Check it at breakfast, lunch, and in the late afternoon. Mark each time that direct sunlight touches the rim. The notes from a single ordinary day tell you more about this spot than a photograph of somebody else's kitchen.

Pick one herb for the conditions you observed. A bright, warm sill is a good place to try basil. If the light arrives in shorter spells, try mint and observe how it responds. Leave room to lift the pot and feel how its weight changes after watering.

Chapter 2

Give the roots room

Choose a pot you can pick up with one hand. Check the drainage holes before adding soil, and place a saucer underneath. Water a small amount and watch it emerge below. Empty the saucer when the dripping stops.

Write the planting date on a label. Each week, note one change: a new pair of leaves, a stem leaning toward the glass, or soil that dries sooner than it did last week. Adjust one thing at a time and record what happens.

Chapter 3

Make the first notebook entry

Put the planting date at the top of a fresh page. Draw the outline of your pot and mark a dot where the tallest stem stands. Under the drawing, write three things you can see without disturbing the plant. Mine read “two pale leaves, a bent label, one dark patch in the soil.” These observations are easier to compare next week than a verdict like “doing well.”

Leave space for the next three visits. Give each entry a date, a time and one question. If you forgot to record yesterday, start with today. A notebook that stays near the pot usually gets more attention than one that lives on a high shelf.

Chapter 4

Learn the weight of a watered pot

Lift the pot before you reach for the watering jug. Describe how it feels in your hand and touch the upper layer of soil. When you do water, stand the pot somewhere it can drain and wait for the dripping to finish before returning it to the sill. Lift it once more. The difference is your reference point.

At the next visit, check the pot and the soil again. Record what you found before deciding what to do. A date on a calendar cannot feel a pot. Over several visits, your notes will tell you which changes are familiar on this particular windowsill.

Chapter 5

Draw a window map

Draw the window as a plain rectangle. Mark the latch, the handle and the places the curtain reaches. Add the pot. A simple plan makes it obvious when opening the window will knock a stem against the frame.

Visit once in the morning and again later in the day. Shade the patches of direct light you actually see. If you move the pot, record its new position rather than erasing the old mark. Keep one unobstructed spot beside the plant for the notebook, a pencil and the saucer when you need to lift it.

Chapter 6

Sketch one leaf at a time

Pick a leaf you can identify again, perhaps the first one immediately above the label. Draw its outline in three strokes. Add the center line and only the veins that you can see. The point is recognition, so a wobbly drawing is enough.

A few days later, find the same leaf. Draw it beside the first sketch at roughly the same size. Use a pencil mark for a new notch, a change of angle or a pale area. Write a question beneath the pair. Two honest pictures are a better record than one beautifully finished picture drawn from memory.

Chapter 7

Change one thing

Suppose the stem leans toward the window and you want to try turning the pot. Mark the side facing the glass with a small removable sticker. Sketch the stem from your usual viewing position and note the time. Make the turn and leave the sticker in place so you know exactly what moved.

For the next few visits, take the same view before you change anything else. If a cold night or an open curtain changes the conditions too, record it. An observation can remain useful even when it does not settle the question you started with.

Chapter 8

Record a small harvest

Choose a herb you can positively identify as food and which you have grown for the kitchen. With clean scissors, take only what you plan to use. Bring the notebook along and draw the sprig beside the date. Write down the dish and the amount you used in language you can repeat.

At the next visit, find the cut point and record what you see. A kitchen note such as “three small basil leaves for one bowl” will be easier to use again than simply writing “harvested.” Leave unrecognized plants out of the meal.

Chapter 9

Read a week in five minutes

Look back through the week and circle one observation that appeared twice. Underline a change you saw only once. Put a small question mark beside anything you cannot explain from your notes. Now give each mark one sentence.

Choose one check for next week. If the pot felt unusually light twice, put “lift the pot before lunch” on the next blank page. If your drawings show the stem leaning the same way, repeat the same viewing angle. The rest of the notes can wait until they help answer a real question.

Chapter 10

Plan the next pot

Before adding a second pot, check whether you can still open the window, drain both saucers and reach the notebook. Draw both pots on the window map. Label one A and the other B so that an observation cannot accidentally move between them.

Write one short plan for the next planting: what you want to grow, where it will stand and what you want to observe. Keep the first notebook open beside the new one. The useful result of the first pot is a set of local observations you can carry forward, one ordinary visit at a time.