Pots are great for growing herbs or leafy greens in small spaces, but keeping plants alive in freely draining pots over summer can be hard work in hot weather.

There is a solution – a wicking planter box! This clever box keeps potting mix moist by the water wicking up from a reservoir at the base. In warm weather, you can go away and leave your plants for a few days – they’re much less likely to die on you.

**You will need:**
- Polystyrene box or plastic container with no holes in the base
- Flexible perforated irrigation pipe (50 or 65mm diameter) that is long enough to go down the sides and along the base of the box in a U shape.
- Permeable fabric – e.g. shade cloth, geotextile fabric or hessian
- Potting mix and compost (enough to fill your planter box)
- Seedlings
- Straw mulch

**How to build a WICKING PLANTER BOX**

1. Cut a piece of permeable fabric large enough to wrap around the flexible pipe. The fabric is to prevent potting mix clogging the pipe.

2. Lay the flexible pipe diagonally across the box in a U shape, with the pipe touching both sides and the bottom of the box. The pipe lying in the bottom of the box will form the reservoir for water to sit in.

3. You need to have small overflow holes at the top of the reservoir to avoid the plants in the box become waterlogged.

   Measure either 50mm or 65mm up from the bottom of the box (the same distance as the width of pipe you’re using).

   At this level, make two small holes with a metal skewer or drill.

   It’s a good idea to move your box to its final location at this step as it will become reasonably heavy once filled. Fill the box with two-thirds potting mix and one-third compost, keeping the pipe in position.
Pour water into the pipe to fill the reservoir. Keep pouring until it starts to run out of the overflow holes. The water will wick up from the reservoir, but it may take a few days for all the potting mix to become fully moist. You will need to top up the reservoir regularly during this period. Alternatively, you can speed up the process by watering the potting mix once to get started and allow the wicking effect to maintain moisture levels thereafter. Check the water level in the pipe regularly and top up as needed.

Within weeks, you should have thriving leafy greens and herbs! You can see for yourself how well these plants grow compared to conventional pots that dry out quickly and cause roots to overheat.

Further instructions:
Here are some other ways you can make a wicking planter box.

- http://milkwood.net/2011/05/09/how-to-make-a-wicking-box-mini-wicking-bed/

Want more practical advice and workshops on how to ‘live greener’?
To sign up for Hume City Council’s Live Green program, visit www.hume.vic.gov.au/livegreen