

Explainer: Steps to harvesting medical marijuana

October 4 2015, by Carla K. Johnson



In this Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2015 photo, Ashley Thompson, former high school agriculture teacher and now a grower for Ataraxia, inspects marijuana plants inside the "Mother Room" at the Ataraxia medical marijuana cultivation center in Albion, Ill. Marijuana strains with names like Blue Dream, OG Kush, Death Star and White Poison are now being cut and dried, and by mid-October, will be turned into medicine in many forms like oils, creams, buds for smoking, edible chocolates and gummies. (AP Photo/Seth Perlman)

Thousands of legal medical marijuana plants are growing under lights in

a warehouse in Albion, a small Illinois city whose residents are more familiar with corn and soybeans. Ataraxia, which runs the facility, was the state's first cultivation company allowed to start growing plants. It has started harvesting and will be the first to deliver to licensed dispensaries throughout the state by mid-October. The Associated Press was given exclusive access to see the crop.

Here's a brief explanation of the 60- to 67-day growing process:

'IMMACULATE CONCEPTION'

The life cycle starts in the "mother room," where about 20 strains of lush, green marijuana [plants](#) thrive. Ataraxia grower Ashley Thompson, a former agriculture teacher, takes cuttings from these plants to start new ones. She won't reveal where the mothers originate—"immaculate conception," she says. While 23 states allow medical use of marijuana, there's a federal prohibition against transporting it across state lines. Growers obtain mother plants either from the black market or from legal operations in other states. Regulators turn a blind eye.

CLONE ROOM

Cuttings are taken to the "clone room" where they take root and get light 24 hours a day. Cuttings take root in seven to 21 days. Each plant has a bar code that identifies its strain and when it began life as a clone.

A LIFE OF LIGHTS

After the plants take root, they are potted and moved into the "veg room," short for vegetative state. They'll spend about two months under lights for 18 hours a day. Like other plants, marijuana is vulnerable to pests like spider mites, springtails and aphids. Good air circulation and super-clean conditions minimize the risk, and workers are sprayed with disinfectant to prevent the spread of pests or disease.



In this Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2015 photo, marijuana clones are monitored inside the "Clone Room" at the Ataraxia medical marijuana cultivation center in Albion, Ill. Cuttings are taken to this room where they take root and get light 24 hours a day. Cuttings take root in seven to 21 days. (AP Photo/Seth Perlman)

THIS BUD'S FOR YOU

Illinois regulations bar pesticides once the plants have flowered, so Ataraxia grows garlic, a natural pest repellent, alongside the cannabis in the flower room. Plants here get 12 hours of light. Buds are ready for harvest when they are covered with fibers called trichomes, which contain the drug's active ingredients, THC and CBD.



In this Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2015 photo, marijuana clones are monitored inside the "Vegetative Room" at the Ataraxia medical marijuana cultivation center in Albion, Ill. After the plants take root, they are potted and moved into this room where they'll spend about two months under lights for 18 hours a day. (AP Photo/Seth Perlman)

MUNCHIES

After cutting and drying, marijuana can be turned into oils, creams, smokeable products and edibles like chocolates. Ataraxia has hired chefs Joseph Pierro and Lenny Ganshirt to create original recipes using cannabis. They won't reveal their secrets, but ingredients on their kitchen shelves include coconut flakes, chocolate, molasses, flaxseed and marshmallows.



In this Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2015 photo, lead grower Dave Wilson cares for marijuana plants in the "Flower Room" at the Ataraxia medical marijuana cultivation center in Albion, Ill. Illinois regulations bar pesticides once the plants have flowered, so Ataraxia grows garlic, a natural pest repellent, alongside the cannabis in the flower room. (AP Photo/Seth Perlman)



In this Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2015 photo, Joseph Pierro, left, and Lenny Ganshirt, right, pose for a photo at the company in Albion, Ill. They are using their culinary degrees as Ataraxia's extraction chefs to create recipes for cannabis edibles which the company will distribute to dispensaries. (AP Photo/Seth Perlman)

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