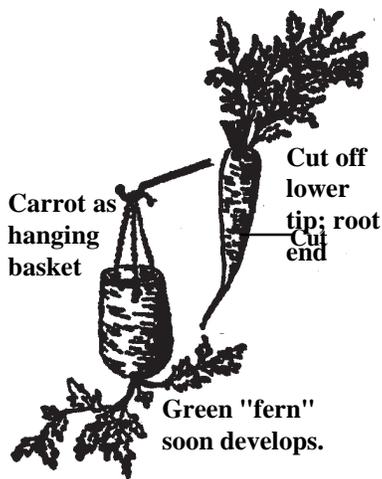




Houseplants from the Kitchen

When you go shopping for groceries you sometimes bring home many items which may be used to produce house plants. Not only is it fun, but growing houseplants from kitchen waste is educational for children - caring for plants can help teach them responsibility. Or just do it for yourself and you will have an easy and inexpensive way to start a delightful indoor garden for your home. There are plenty of things to experiment with. Just look around the kitchen and use your imagination. Numerous kitchen by-products will flourish on the windowsill if just given the chance.

Carrots can be coaxed to produce their graceful fern-like foliage in two ways. One is to cut a 1- to 3-inch section from the top of a large, fresh carrot and plant it in moist sand with only the upper part exposed. If you keep it well-watered and in the sunlight, leaves will soon appear and develop into an attractive fern-like plant. The other way is to make an inverted hanging display. You will need a two-inch top section of a carrot. Hollow this out to form a water reservoir, and use a skewer and string to hang it. Keep the reservoir full and the foliage will soon grow upwards around the inverted carrot. The same treatment can be given to beet, parsnip, or turnip tops. Beet tops are fun, for they send out glossy rich green leaves with prominent red veins and they are edible.



Place 2"-3" piece of carrot, turnip or beet in pebbles and water.

Attractive feathery carrot plant

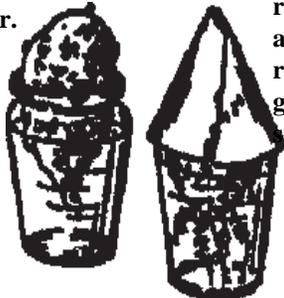


Sweet potatoes produce viney stems that are somewhat like philodendrons. You can produce these easily by setting the narrow end of a sweet potato in a container of sand or a glass of water, supported with toothpicks or a cardboard collar. Place it in a warm light spot and in 10 days the first roots should begin to sprout; the shoots will soon follow. Cut off all but two or three of the shoots if you want long viney top growth. This

will then grow to a length of several feet and can be trained around a window frame, or on a stake or small trellis. If you want a more permanent plant, pot the sweet potato as it begins to grow, being very gentle with the roots as you do so. Later you can take cuttings

A Sweet Potato Vine

With the fatter part up, place potato in glass jar. Fill jar with water to touch end of tuber.



Cover with paper cone, remove after root growth starts.



Sweet potato plant--one of the prettiest.

Irish Potato Plant

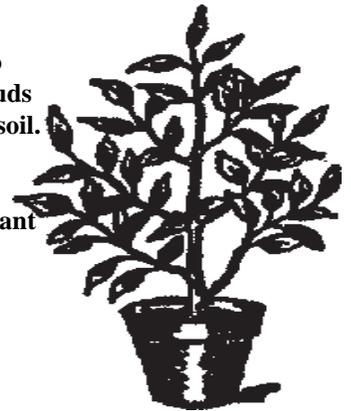


Potato tuber with eyes.

Potato tuber with sprouts growing from eyes.



Plant piece of potato with 2 or 3 eyes or buds 3" below surface of soil. Water and give plenty of light. An interesting potato plant will soon develop.



from the plant and root them. You can also have fun with regular potatoes as well.

Pineapple tops can be transformed into handsome plants with long sword-like leaves arching out from the center. With a sharp knife slice off the rosette of leaves with an inch of fruit attached. Trim away the solid portion of the fruit, being careful not to injure the tough stringy core. Remove a couple lower rows of leaves so a bare core can be seen. Allow this to air dry for a couple days, as a fresh cut may decay when you try to root it. Then either plant the pineapple section directly or suspend it over water to root.

Slice off leafy top of pineapple.



Insert 1" deep in pot of moist sand.



Set in water



If you decide to plant directly, the cut surface may be dusted with a rooting hormone after drying. Suggested rooting mediums are builder's sand, vermiculite or other sterile propagating material. Insert the pineapple section so that the rooting medium comes right up to the base of the leaves. Support with sticks if necessary. The rooting medium must be kept damp - keep the cups at the bottom of the pineapple leaves wet at all times. Cover the pot with a plastic bag to maintain high humidity and place in a sunny, warm location (at least 64°F at night). In 2-6 weeks roots should appear. If the top seems slow to root, spray it with a foliar fertilizer once a week. Use regular houseplant liquid fertilizer diluted to 1/4 the recommended strength.

After roots have developed transplant the pineapple to a container using as the potting mixture a light sandy-loam soil (example: 2 parts soil, 2 parts humus, and 1 part sand). Good drainage is essential. Use a container (preferably clay) with drainage holes and place a 1- to 2-inch layer of small stones or shards (pieces of broken clay pot) on the bottom to aid in providing good drainage. Cover the pot with a plastic bag for 3 weeks. After this time your pineapple plant may be treated like other house plants.

Pineapples will thrive in a sunny, draft-free location at temperatures from 65-80° F. While the plant is quite tolerant of very dry air, a relative humidity of 50-70% is desirable. During the summer months the soil must be kept moist at all times (but not soggy). The cups at the base of the leaves must always be kept filled with water. During the winter months decrease the frequency of watering. Spray the plant with a foliar fertilizer every two weeks during the period of most rapid growth which occurs during the spring and summer. Reduce the feeding to once a month during the fall and winter.

Pineapple plants are slow growers and will mature in 2 or 2 1/2 years. After that they may surprise you with a flower stalk! It will start off as a red bud in the center of the plant and in 3 weeks will have become a stalk with numerous flowers. These 1/2-inch, blue-violet blooms start opening at the bottom of the cluster. Each lasts only a day but the remaining floral parts, needing no pollination, will each develop into one small segment of a newly maturing pineapple fruit! If by chance, you have the plant for a few years and it doesn't set flowers, you can force it into bloom by placing it in a plastic bag with a cut apple. Leave it this way for 4 days in good light. The apples give off ethylene gas which stimulates flowering of the pineapple and other members of the bromeliad family. Within 2 to 3 months after this treatment your pineapple should bloom. (This procedure for forcing bloom is only for bromeliads; ethylene gas may shorten the life of other plants or cause their leaves to drop.)

Apple trees in miniature can be raised by planting some seeds in a well-drained soil mixture. (To improve drainage in the bottom of the container you can add a 1/2-inch layer of crushed stone or pebbles which will allow excess water to drain out easily.) If these trees eventually grow too big for the house they may be planted outside in late spring, but bear in mind that they may never produce fruit of good quality because of unknown pollination sources.

Stone fruit pits are a little trickier to grow, but with patience will produce a variety of treelike plants. Peaches, apricots, cherries, nectarines and plums all make good experiments. Make sure to use only fresh fruit. Cooking and canning will kill the plant embryo inside the stone. The hardier plums and cherries will germinate better after storage below 40° F. or after a winter outdoors. For apricots and peaches try very gently cracking the hard shells with a nut cracker before planting. Be careful not to damage the kernel, however, for this is the living seed. Plant the stone an inch deep in a damp potting mixture and with luck you'll have a little tree coming along. Be patient!

Citrus seeds can become flourishing house plants too. Oranges, lemons, grapefruit, limes, and even kumquats and tangerines all make exciting indoor foliage plants.

Plant the seeds as soon as they're removed from the fruit so that they will not dry out. If the fruit was stored in a cool place, soak seeds in warm water for 24 hours first. Plant the seeds 1/2 inch deep, pointed end up, in a sterile potting mix. Keep them warm and damp, but not wet, in a dark location. Place in a sunny spot after germination. The citrus seedlings will grow into small trees. You will need to keep pruning them back unless you have a very high living room ceiling! If you'd rather have a shrubby form, keep pinching back the growing tips.

Citrus plants can tolerate most home temperatures and dry indoor air. They need well-drained soil. If you are using a decorative ceramic or enclosed planter that doesn't have drainage holes, double-pot the plant with the inner pot having holes. A commercial potting mix with additional perlite works well or a home mix of equal parts sand, garden loam and peat moss. Do not add lime to the mix. Citrus plants do best in an acid soil. Fertilize once a month with a soluble fertilizer. One teaspoon of a regular fertilizer dissolved in a gallon of water is usually enough.

Citrus plants need bright light and may need supplemental grow-lights during winter. Even those placed in front of large windows actually receive only minimal light on dark winter days. During the summer months potted citrus can be moved outdoors. Citrus plants add a nice accent to balconies or patios. Bear in mind they are not winter hardy in the north and should be brought back into the house before danger of frost.

Under most home conditions citrus plants started from seed this way will not flower or bear fruit. Indoor citrus plants seen with flowers and/or fruits are special miniature varieties. Plants grown from standard eating varieties will make decorative foliage specimens and attractive floor plants.



Grapefruit plant with dark green glossy leaves.



Attractive Date Palm

Date palms are fun to grow from seed. These exotic plants will only develop from non-pasteurized seeds however, so check the package label for this information. Plant 3 or 4 seeds 1/2 inch deep in a 4-inch pot using a damp potting mixture. Keep the pots in a warm area (at least 70° F.), dark and damp. The first leaf should emerge in a month or two, thick, coarse and grass-like. Now put the pot in good light. With occasional feeding and potting into larger containers as needed, you will have a tropical-looking palm tree in a few years to add to your home decor.

Avocados have recently become popular. If you're choosing an avocado with a tree in mind, buy a Florida-grown variety. These tend to germinate more readily and grow more quickly than California varieties. A Florida avocado tends to be larger, rougher and darker skinned, and a little more pear-shaped, a true "alligator pear."

Once you have removed the avocado pit, wash it off and then allow it to dry for a couple days. Peel away as much of the onion like skin as possible. To speed germination you can also try slicing off the top of the pointed end (about a 1/4" thick slab). You may then start the pit in either of two ways. The common method is to suspend it over a glass of lukewarm water supported by toothpicks. The base of the pit (broad end) is covered by 1/4 inch of water which is maintained at a constant level during the rooting period. In 3-8 weeks the pit will split and roots and shoots will emerge. Once several strong roots have developed, plant the pit in a sandy potting mix, being very careful of the roots. Leave just a little of the pit sticking above the soil level.

Although the above method provides visual entertainment, it does allow the possibility of a rotted pit and the chance of root damage during potting. Thus, the following method is suggested for those who can stand the suspense of not knowing when their pit has taken root. The preparation of the pit is the same, but instead of suspending it over water, just plant it directly in a sandy potting mix. Leave the top third exposed and make sure the soil doesn't dry out. Once the avocado is growing (some may take as long as 3 months to

Growing an avocado plant



Avocado seed

Place seed with wide indented part in water, supported by toothpicks,

When roots are 1/2" long plant seed in soil.



Resulting plant is very attractive.



germinate), add humus to the pot to cover the pit. This will protect the roots from the hazards of hot sun and dry soil for they tend to grow close to the surface.

Avocados don't like wet feet, so make sure your potting mix has good drainage and your container has drainage holes. Fertilize once a month and keep out of drafts. Mist the foliage often if your air is dry, for avocados tend to drop their lower leaves in dry atmospheres. (This also happens when the soil is allowed to dry out, so maintain a constant "watering watch.")

Place the plant in a sunny window with filtered light during all but the winter months. A south window with full sun would be a good location then. In the summer you may also set the avocado plant outdoors, but it must be brought back in around Labor Day. Select a sheltered spot to avoid sun scald and maintain a lookout for insect pests.

The natural growth habit of the avocado is treelike but it can be modified by pinching out the growing tip to make a more shrubby form of the glossy green-leaved plant. If left to itself the avocado will eventually branch (it might reach 6 feet in height

first). These natural branches tend to droop and are usually fairly long. The trunk will become woody in time.

Fun with Seeds

Would you like to have a neat, low, green, hedge-like border along the front of the planter in which your house plants are growing? If so, soak corn cobs in water and sprinkle with grass seeds. A grass hedge will develop which may be sheared as needed to maintain an attractive appearance.

For a larger mound of green growth, place cress or lettuce seeds in the holes of a wet sponge. The young plants will form a ball-like

Watching Seeds Grow



Soak lentils overnight.



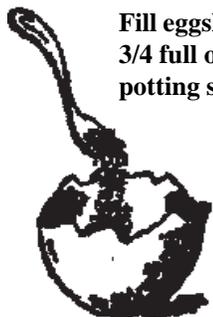
1" water

Place lentils around top between wet paper towel and glass.



Young lentil seedlings

Eggshell Garden



Fill eggshells 3/4 full of potting soil.



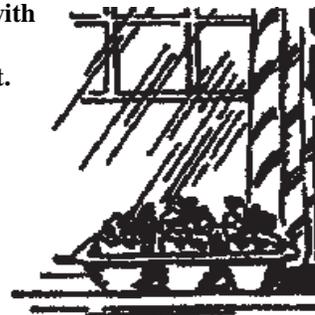
Make hole in soil with finger.



Plant bean in hole. Cover with soil.



Sprinkle with water and keep moist.



Place in sunny window. Seedlings will soon develop.

original fact sheet by Charles Williams, UNH Extension Ornamentals Specialist, edited and reformatted, 3/10

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