

GARBAGE GARDENING

What is this strangely titled topic? It refers to starting plants from seeds, pits, and parts of plants which might ordinarily be thrown out with the garbage. This topic also includes beginning plants from pieces of exotic fruits and vegetables found in some grocery stores. With a little patience and some gardening skill you can start interesting and different houseplants from your garbage!

Potting Soil

When potting soil is referred to in this booklet, a well-drained soilless mix should be used. We prefer a mix which is 1/3 peat moss, 1/3 vermiculite, and 1/3 perlite. Always be sure that the potting mix is evenly moist before using. The mix should not be wet.

Containers

When potting up a plant or starting a large pit, any clean plastic, ceramic, or clay pot with drainage is suitable. However, don't start with too large of a pot. An avocado pit may be started in a 6 inch pot, but may also be started in smaller pots.

When attempting to germinate seeds, use seed flats or containers which are not more than a few inches deep. These should have drainage provided through bottom holes. "Garbage" containers of styrofoam and plastic, such as egg cartons and margarine containers, may also be used. These should have holes placed in the bottom to allow for sufficient drainage.

Light

Light is usually not required until after seeds germinate. Once leaves are pushed above the soil they should be given bright indirect light. Fluorescent lights close, less than 12 inches, to the seedlings are ideal.

There are many different types of plants started in Garbage Gardening and they vary in the amount of light which they require. Try to give the plants lots of light. If they become spindly or stretch towards the light, this is usually an indication that they need

more light. A pale green color of the foliage indicates the same. When you are supplying direct sunlight, do not allow the foliage to become burned or scorched.

Water and Humidity

Because the plants vary so much it is difficult to say what their moisture requirements are in one general statement. Many of those started from tropical fruits and vegetables prefer a moist soil and a high humidity. The humidity may be increased around the plants by placing them on a bed of moist pebbles. It is also essential with these plants not to allow the soil to dry out too severely.

The potting mixture in which seeds are planted should be kept constantly and evenly moist. This can be easily achieved by placing the seed flats in clear plastic bags or covering their tops with plastic wrap. These coverings still should allow some fresh air movement, and the potting mix should be checked for moisture every two days.

Heat

You can hasten the germination process of seeds by applying bottom heat. By this we mean using a heat source from below the seed flat to warm the soil and speed up germination. Heating cables, which are specially prepared plastic covered wires, may be purchased in local garden stores or through garden catalogs. Heat may also be supplied from a warm radiator, heating pipe, or even a food warming tray. The soil temperature should not reach over 80°F and caution must be taken not to allow the soil to dry out.

Stratification

This term refers to giving seedlings a cold treatment before attempting to germinate them. Some seeds are naturally dormant and require a cold period to break this dormancy. Examples of such plants are apples, pears, and peaches. Many other woody plants which are native to temperate climates also require this cold period for seeds.

To stratify seeds, place them in a seed flat of moistened potting mix, place in a plastic bag, and place in the refrigerator. Do not place in the freezer compartment. The seeds should be stratified at a temperature of 32°- 40°F. Check the flat periodically to see if the potting mix is still moist. The length of this cold period varies with the plants.

Another requirement for Garbage Gardening is patience. Many of the pits and seeds take a long time to germinate and only the most patient gardener will be rewarded. Sometimes the conditions of germination or sprouting are very exacting and it will take several tries before you have success. Not all of the plants you grow will be as attractive as the common foliage plants but they will add variety and curiosity to your plant collection. **GARBAGE GARDENING** is fun and challenging.

Radishes, Carrots, Turnips, Parsnips

Any of these root vegetables can be used to make attractive centerpieces of foliage. Select those vegetables which still have traces of the stem left on them. If the top has been trimmed off this will not work.

1. Fill a low bowl with some attractive decorative pebbles or activated charcoal such as used in fish aquariums.
2. Cut off portions of the long vegetables so that the top portion is about two inches long. The radishes and some turnips do not need to be trimmed. Place these tops in the dish of pebbles so that about one inch of the base of each one is covered by the pebbles.
3. Add water to the dish to the top of the pebbles. Keep the dish in a warm, light location.

Within several days to a week, leaves should begin to sprout from the top of the root vegetables. These will last several weeks and then the foliage will die back.

Sweet Potatoes, Yams, and Potatoes

1. One of the most famous forms of garbage gardening has been sprouting and growing a sweet potato vine in the window. This is difficult to do today because most of the potatoes in the store have been treated by the grower with a chemical to inhibit

sprouting or have been kiln dried. If you find a potato which has not been treated or has some sprouts on it already, you can try growing these.

2. Place the potato with the rounded end up in a glass of water. Support it with 3-4 toothpicks, placed about 1/3 of the way down the potato. Have the water touch only the bottom 1/3 of the potato. Set in a dark location until sprouts begin to appear. Change water frequently.
3. When shoots appear, move the glass to a location with bright light.
4. When the shoots attain a height of 2-3 inches, remove all but two or three.
5. Add a minute amount of soluble fertilizer to the water occasionally and change the water frequently. No other attention needs to be given to your vine.

Comment

The regular potato has no special rounded end, but the sweet potato and yam do. They may all be started in a pot of soil instead of in water.

Apples, Peaches, Pears, Cherries, and Plums

1. Remove pits and seeds from fully ripe fruit. Wash pulp from pits. Select seeds which are well filled out, seeds which are shriveled and small will probably not germinate.
2. Sow pits and seeds in seed flats and stratify them in the refrigerator. Cover with twice as much soil as the seed is wide.

Apples 2-3 months
Peaches 3-4 months
Apricots 3-4 weeks
Pears 2-3 months
Cherries 4 months
Plums 3 months

3. After the seeds have been stratified, place them in a warm location, keeping the soil moist. Gradually move to brighter light as the seeds sprout. Transplant to pots when there are 4-5 leaves.
4. After stratification, the only seeds which you need to crack the outer covering off of are from the pits of peaches and apricots. Cherries and plums may be

planted directly in the potting mix. Plant pits one inch deep.

Comment

Plants started from these seeds will not live indefinitely indoors. They need the regular cycle of the seasons. They may be planted outdoors, but tender varieties of peaches, apricots, plums, and cherries may not survive severe winter conditions. Also be aware that even if the plants do bear fruit eventually, it will not be of the variety of the mother fruit. For example, A Delicious apple seed will not produce a tree which bears Delicious apples.

Lemons, Oranges, Grapefruit, and Limes

1. Remove seeds from ripe citrus fruit. Rinse. Select only those seeds which are full and not shriveled.
2. Plant immediately in seed flats. No stratification is needed since these are tropical fruits.
3. When there are 4-5 leaves on the plant, transplant to 4-inch pots.
4. Give lots of sun and keep the soil moist.

Avocado

1. Start with a slightly overripe avocado. There are several different types, one a larger dark green type from Florida and another a smaller, rounder type with smooth or bumpy green skin from California. Any type is suitable.
2. Remove the flesh, being careful not to cut the pit. Wash the pit gently in warm water to remove the slimy green pulp. Allow the pit to dry overnight.
3. Peel off the brown skin surrounding the pit. This is sometimes easy but not always. It is sometimes much easier if you allow the pit to dry for two days, instead of one.
4. Place the pit in a 5-7 inch pot with the flat end of the pit down and the pointed end up. Bury the pit in potting soil so that only the top 1/3 of the pit is showing. (An avocado pit needs light to germinate.) Be sure the potting soil is moist.
5. Place the pot and pit in a light but not bright

location. Keep the potting soil moist and the area humid.

6. It will take from one to three months for the pit to germinate. Once it does germinate, cover the remaining 1/3 of the pit with potting soil.
7. When the plant reaches a height of 5-6 inches, cut the stem two inches from the top. This will remove most of the top growth but the plant will send out more side shoots. Keep the plant pinched back to encourage branching. Grow the plant in a sunny location.

Comment: The more familiar method of starting an avocado is in a glass of water supporting the pit with toothpicks. Although the method of starting it in a pot may be slower, it is generally more successful. If you do start it in water, change the water weekly. Pot the plant as soon as it has several leaves.

Pineapple

1. Select a pineapple with leaves which appear fresh and still green. Check the center to see if it still looks fresh. For your eating pleasure, select a pineapple which is ripe.
2. Slice off the top of the pineapple about two inches below the top rosette of leaves.
3. Trim off the outer skin and most of the fleshy part of the fruit. Allow only part of the tough central core to remain. Let the top dry for two days.
4. Remove any dead leaves at the base of the crown and about 4-6 layers of leaves. This will uncover some root-like nodules. Plant the top of the pineapple so that the base of the crown is touching the moistened potting mix. Do not bury any portion of the top except the dried core.
5. Keep the soil moist and fill the center rosette of leaves whenever it becomes dry. Mist the plant regularly. Roots should form in 5-6 weeks. Check for roots only if the plant appears to be rotting or after a period of six weeks has passed. Plants should be placed in a warm, light location.
6. A pineapple is a bromeliad, a type of plant which is able to obtain nutrients and water through its leaves. After the plant begins to grow, keep the soil

moderately moist and water the plant by keeping the center rosette of leaves filled with water. They may also be fertilized in this manner with a dilute solution of fertilizer.

Papaya

1. The trouble with this tropical fruit is finding it. Once you locate it in the grocery store, usually during the winter months, you are all set to go. Select a ripe fruit, one which is golden yellow.
2. Cut open the papaya and remove the seeds. Enjoy this tasty exotic fruit, don't throw it away.
3. The seeds are encased in a gelatin-like covering. This may be removed by squeezing the seed gently or by rolling the seeds between two layers of toweling paper.
4. Sow the seeds in a seed flat and keep the potting mix moist. The seeds will germinate in several weeks.
5. When the plants are several inches high, transplant the sturdiest to pots.
6. Grow plants in a warm, sunny location.

Comment

There are many other tropical and exotic fruits which can be grown into houseplants. Many of these are not commonly found in the chain grocery stores, but do appear from time to time when they are in season. Ethnic grocery stores which carry fresh produce are often good sources of plants for your Garbage Gardening. Oriental and Latin American markets are excellent. To grow many of these you will need a resource book on Garbage Gardening. We suggest you use one of the books listed on the next column or any other good book on the topic.

Other Tropical and Exotic Plants Which May Be Started for Indoor Gardening:

Date	Chayote	Taro
Fig	Malanga	Coffee
Mango	Sugarcane	Kumquat
Sugarcane	Arrowhead	Loquat

Jujube	Jicama	Carob
Kiwi Fruit	Tamarind	Ginger
Tamarind	Persimmon	Black Sapote
Cerimoya	Guava	Sapodilla
Pomegranate	Litchee	Spanish Lime
Kiwi Fruit	Bitter Melon	
	Japanese Black Radish	
	Japanese White Radish	
	Chinese Star Apple	

If you are intrigued with Garbage Gardening and want to learn more about the subject or you are having problems with some of the things you are attempting to grow, there are a number of books now available on the subject. After glancing through these you will find that everyone has a little different way to do the same thing, but it is the way which is successful for them. Some of these books include:

The After-Dinner Gardening Book by Richard W. Langer, Collier Books, New York, New York, 1971, 198pgs.

The Citrus Seed Grower's Indoor How-To Book by Hazel Perper, Dodd, Mead, and Company, New York, New York, 1971, 64 pgs. (hardbound)

The Avacado Pit Grower's Indoor How-To Book by Hazel Perper, Walker and Company, New York, New York, 1965, 64 pgs. (hardbound)

The Indoor How-To Book of Oats, Peas, Beans, and Other Pretty Plants by Hazel Perper, The Viking Press, New York, New York, 1975, 64 pgs. (hardbound)

The Don't Throw It - Grow It Book of Houseplants by Millicent Selsam and Deborah Peterson, Random House Inc., New York, New York, 1977, 142 pgs.

Starting From Scratch by John Whitman, Signet, New York, New York, 1976, 211 pgs.