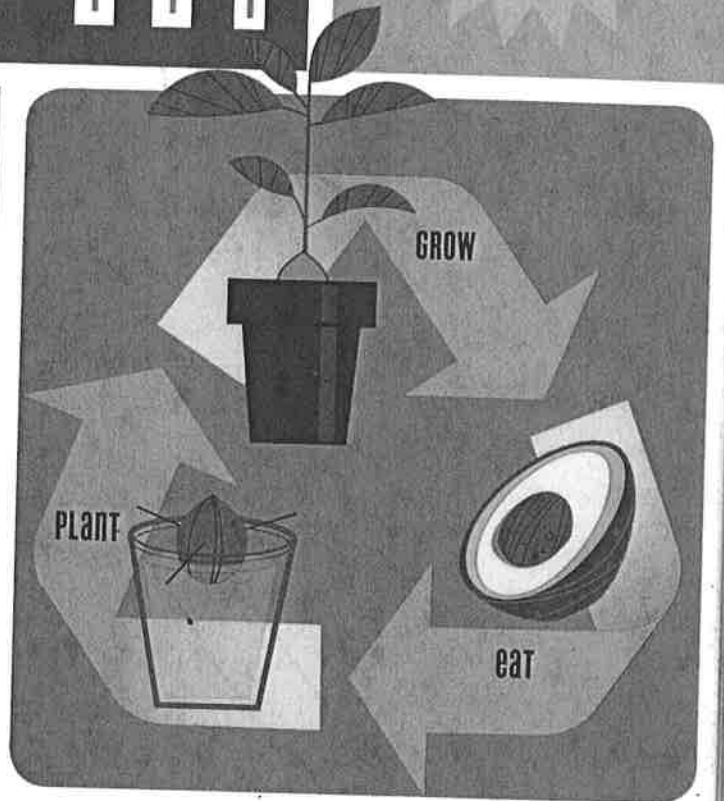


don't throw it,
GROW IT!

*it's
kitchen
magic!*

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WINDOWSILL
PLANTS
from
kitchen
scraps

DEBORAH PETERSON & MILLCENT SELSAM



PLANT THE PITS, ROOTS, SHOOTS, TUBERS AND SEEDS OF...

almonds, anise, avocados, beans, celery, citrus, dates, fennel, figs, gingerroot, kiwi, mango, mustard, papaya, peanuts, persimmon, pineapple, pomegranate, sesame, squash, turnip, tropical guava...and more!

AVOCADO

Persea species, LAURACEAE

PLANT TYPE *evergreen tree*
GROWTH RATE *quick-growing*

METHOD *from seed*
LIGHT *bright light*

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

As avocado plants grow, they develop small clusters of leaves around 6-inch stems, which grow taller and taller without producing any branches. The avocado can become one of the most beautiful plants in your home. At one time Milly had a 36-inch barrel into which she had set ten avocados in varying stages of development. It formed a cool, refreshing grove at the end of the living room.

HOW TO GROW IT

When Milly and I first experimented with growing avocados, there were two main types. The larger, grown in Florida, had shiny, dark green skins and a large pit that could be 2 inches across. This particular pit germinated quite readily — in fact, you often found it with roots already started. Avocados from California were smaller, some with purple, nubby skin; others smooth and green. The pit found in the latter avocados was also smaller and more difficult to germinate. Within these two groups there were over 400 hybrids.



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Today, commercial selections are limited to the Haas avocado, a hybrid of the California type of fruit, and the large Florida avocado (a.k.a. alligator pear). The Haas has a rich, buttery texture and pleasant nutty flavor.

After some experimentation, we found that the sphagnum bag method was easier and more reliable than the more common practice of puncturing the avocado seed and suspending it in a glass of water. (See The Secret of the Sphagnum Bag, page 8.) Germination time varies with each pit, but the average time is a few weeks.

When the roots are 3 to 4 inches long, transfer the avocado to a pot 1 inch larger than the pit. Fill the pot one-third full with potting soil. Gently place the pit on the soil and fill in enough soil around it so that half the pit is exposed at the top. Place the pot in a warm, bright spot (avocados do not require direct sunlight). Once established, avocados grow quite rampantly. Keep the soil moist, but not soggy, at all times. During their natural resting period from October to January, avocados need less water. As soon as the days lengthen, new leaves will appear and you should give them more water.



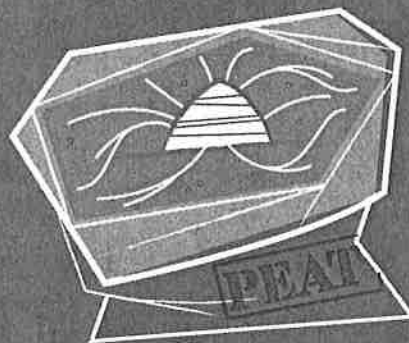
TO PINCH OR NOT TO PINCH?

To encourage branching, the usual technique is to cut the single avocado stem back to within 3 inches of the pit. Each time the stem is cut back, however, it sprouts a branch that takes over the lead, leaving you with not only another unbranching stem but also a stump where the original stem was cut off. If you do this enough times, your plant will begin to look like a hat rack. Let the avocado go its own way until, about a year later, it starts to branch naturally. At this time you can trim the side branches to make the plant more shapely.

THE SECRET OF THE SPHAGNUM BAG

When Milly and I wanted to start mango from its large seed or taro from its root, we had no idea which end was up and which end was down. We also wanted to create a warm, moist environment, similar to its natural sprouting environment. Our answer was to create a sphagnum bag. This bag can be used for tubers such as malanga, large seeds such as genip, and roots such as taro.

Fill a quart-sized, sealable plastic bag with barely moist, long-grained sphagnum moss. The moss should have the consistency of a good unbaked pie crust and should not drip when squeezed. (Long-grained moss is available at most garden centers; if you can't find any, use regular peat moss.) Place the seed in the bag, making sure it is completely surrounded with the moss. Seal the bag and place it in a warm, dark spot. Check the bag several times a week to make sure there are no soft spots on the tuber or root, or mold on the seed. If it is too dry, add water; if it is too wet, leave the bag open for a day. Seeds or tubers raised in the sphagnum bag will have to be hardened off (see *Easing New Plants into the Wider World*, page 13) when transplanted.



starting plant

Use this easy method for starting root vegetables such as carrots, turnips, or bulbs such as garlic. Find a container large enough to hold a group of vegetables, filling it two-thirds of the container with pebbles (these are available at most garden centers). Place the roots on top of the pebbles. Allow one-third of the roots to be in water to the level of the pebbles at all times.

starting plant

Most root vegetables can be started in soil. Buy firm, fresh vegetables with the leaves from the root. Find a container to hold the root (or roots) and fill it two-thirds full of moist potting soil. Allow one-third of the roots to be above the soil. Water the soil so the face of the soil feels moist (see page 4).