

# The Green Thumb

By GEORGE ABRAHAM

This is a reminder for those who want to start your own tomato plants to order seed now.

While you're at it, order one of the new seed starting kits that are available. These kits come with small trays, Jiffy 7 pellets, which are little compressed wafers of potting soil combined in one handy unit. You also get some loose starting soil, which is ideal for starting your own seed.

Just in case you've never tried the Jiffy 7 pellets, I'll explain further what they are. These highly compressed wafers are about 1/4 inch thick, but when you add water, they swell in minutes into a cylinder 1 1/2 inches in diameter, and about 2 1/2 inches high, all ready to sow seed or set transplants.

No pot is needed, since the growing medium is enclosed in a plastic net that holds its cylindrical shape. When ready, plant and pellet are set out in the garden. You get no shock or check in growth. The roots continue to grow right through the net. The growing medium is sterile

spaghnum peat with fertilizer added, and its excellent aeration and water-holding capacity encourage vigorous plant growth.

Many readers are raising coffee trees indoors and are doing a good job with it. The foliage is handsome but don't expect to get berries from your coffee tree.

Brown spots on edge of leaves are due to over-watering. Keep the soil moist, but not soggy. Syringe the leaves every few days. The coffee tree likes semi-shade, or diffused sunlight, NOT DIRECT SUN. They grow in a semi-shady spot in jungles. Coffee trees can stand a temperature anywhere from 40 to 80 degrees, and still grow well.

Every three months feed it growing medium is enclosed in a plastic net that holds its cylindrical shape. When ready, plant and pellet are set out in the garden. You get no shock or check in growth. The roots continue to grow right through the net. The growing medium is sterile

it's possible. If any reader has produced flowers or berries on his coffee tree, please write and tell us.

**GREEN THUMB CLINIC:** "Please give us a formula for spraying, without using high powered chemicals."

Here's one organic gardener sent us: "Take flour, cayenne pepper, and cut up some garlic cloves. Mix well and let stand a couple days. When dew is on or after a rain, sprinkle this mixture on plants. You have to judge the flour by the amount of plants you grow."

Free: Send me a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a copy of our bulletin, "Gardening Tips for Vegetables."

## Gardeners Warned Of Miracle Con-Men

**LANSING**  
Coming of spring marks the appearance of miracle plant con-men who prey on home gardeners and landscapers.

"Don't be taken in by these racketeers" is the warning sounded by Atty. Gen. Frank J. Kelley, agricultural director B. Dale Ball and the Michigan Association of Nurserymen (MAN).

Home gardeners are warned against high pressure salesmen and mail order advertisers using fancy names for ordinary shrubs and plants and making exaggerated claims for their plant material.

Beware of glowing word descriptions and faked photographs of climbing vines, peaches, giant climbing

strawberries, 1,000 giant red roses on a single bush, flowering, shade trees that grow roof high in a single year, etc.

"All consumer complaints, including verbal misrepresentations are received by the Consumer Protection Division of the Attorney General's office and appropriate action is taken," said Asst. Atty. Gen. Edwin M. Bladen. "It is our experience that purchasers who deal with established local merchants can see what they are buying and are not misled by photographs or lurid verbal pictures."

"One cannot expect to get high quality stock at ridiculously low prices," said Dean F. Lovitt, chief of the plant industry division of the Dept. of Agriculture.

"Purchasers should always demand a certificate of inspection with the stock as their assurance that it has passed inspection for insects and disease."

"Local nurserymen usually are familiar with local conditions and the varieties likely to do well in an area, and their advice can be helpful."

"There are reliable mail order houses but there is no substitute for the expert service on selection, planting and care of the plant that your local nurseryman can give you," said MAN Exec. Sec. L.E. Ahl.

"He wants to protect your interests so he can continue to serve you. That's why we advise -- Ask Your Nurseryman First."

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## Bonsai Tips Given By MSU Experts

**EAST LANSING**  
Bonsai has become an increasingly popular type of container gardening. The careful dwarfing of trees, shrubs, vines and houseplants can easily develop from an interesting garden hobby into a consuming garden art, according to Michigan State University horticulturists.

Pruning is an essential part of bonsai gardening, states Extension Horticulturist J. Lee Taylor. A miniature tree usually needs only one heavy branch pruning in its life -- when the basic form is initially established. Nipping and pinching back will control size and develop the tree's form.

Any simple container that fits the "character" of the plant is suitable. However, the classic Japanese bonsai pots seem most appropriate. They are available in a variety of shapes and depths and come in dark brown, terra cotta or a number of glazed finishes.

The type of potting mix used depends on the type of plant you choose. Use one-half coarse sand, one-fourth leaf mold and one-fourth soil for conifers. For broad-leaved plants, use one-fourth coarse sand, one-fourth leaf mold and one-half soil.

Taylor recommends repotting only when necessary. Do not water a

bonsai the day before you plan to repot it. Grasp the trunk firmly and, rock it gently until the root ball comes free of the pot. Set the root ball in a bucket of Vitamin B-enriched water to loosen the old soil and to keep the roots moistened and nourished.

Poke the old soil away from roots carefully with a pointed stick. Inspect roots carefully and cut away about one-third of the mass.

Place bits of broken pottery in the base of the container. Put in a layer of soil mix, then settle in the bonsai, keeping the base of the trunk at the desired level. Fill the container with mix, settling it firmly around the roots.

Water thoroughly, but do not fertilize for at least four or five weeks. Finish with moss and rocks on the surface, by partially sinking them into the soil.

Water the soil when it begins to dry. Spray the foliage lightly and soak the soil thoroughly. Good drainage is essential. If plants are outdoors, avoid direct sunlight and wind; they tend to make the plants dry out. Outdoor plants may need water more frequently. "Fertilize sparingly," Taylor says. As new spring growth begins, fertilize every other week until the leaves are fully open.

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