

GARDENING

Make pretty plants out of these ingredients

GARDEN SPOT



MARTY FIGLEY

watch the miracle of growth happen and perhaps have a contest to see which grows the best. So

What do avocado, pineapples and sweet potatoes have in common? You guessed it! They can all be transformed into pretty houseplants with very little effort. The children can get involved and watch the miracle of growth happen and perhaps have a contest to see which grows the best. So

get ready, set, go! The seeds of avocado, *Persea americana*, germinate very easily and make attractive pot plants after several years of growth. They do need to be pinched back to encourage side branching so they become full and lush. Give them plenty of light so they don't become spindly, and stake them if necessary. They don't set flowers or fruit when grown indoors, but the foliage makes up for that. Stick three or four toothpicks around the center of the seed to support it over a container of water so that it is half in and half out. When roots are visible you can place it in a pot with

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good houseplant soil; keep half the seed above the soil. Provide four or more hours of direct sunlight from a south window. Alternatively you can grow the seed directly in soil. Soak it in hot water for 30 minutes, then trim about 1/2-inch off the pointed end with a sharp knife. Dip the wound in fungicide. Set the seed in the soil as mentioned above. After repotting, keep the soil evenly moist; water until the excess drains out the hole in the bottom of the pot and discard.

It likes regular house temperatures, somewhat cooler at night. A humidifier will supply additional moisture to the air. Use an all-purpose fertilizer through the year, more in the summer. When dried and ground up, avocado leaves give a somewhat nutty, anise-like flavor and are often used in Mexican cuisine. A thin-skinned black avocado has the best flavor. Sweet potatoes, *Ipomoea Batatas*, also grow well partially suspended in water with toothpicks stuck into the flesh so it is

partially out of the water. They like the same conditions as avocados; be sure to change the water for both these plants regularly. Soon the pretty foliage will grow and cascade down the container. Use a clear one so you can see the roots as they develop. Use this same technique to prepare sweet potato slips to grow in the garden, although you'll need to time it so they will be ready for the garden after the last frost. When the green shoots are about 4 to 5 inches long, gently twist them from the section of potato. Collect the shoots and

put them in a container of water so that only their bottom halves are immersed. In just a few days roots will appear. Keep the roots cut so they don't get longer than an inch or two before planting. It might be fun to find blue or purple sweet potatoes to see what the foliage looks like. Have you been successful growing a plant from an exotic fruit or vegetable? Let me know. Marty Figley is an advanced master gardener based in Birmingham. You can leave her a message by dialing (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then 111, then 3445. Her fax number is (248) 644-1314.

GARDENING CALENDAR

Does your garden club have an upcoming event or meeting you want publicized? Send items for consideration in Gardening Calendar to Ken Abramczyk, Observer Newspapers, 36261 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48160 or e-mail kabramczyk@oe.homecomm.net. To send a fax, call (734) 691-7279.

GARDEN CLUBS

LIVONIA
Bette Pool, a member and past president of the Farmington Garden Club, will discuss "Water Gardening" at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 6, at the Livonia Senior Center, 33000 Civic Center, near Farmington and Five Mile roads. Visitors are welcome.

FLORAL STUFF

ARRANGEMENTS
Several workshops are scheduled at Keller & Stein Florist and Greenhouse, 42158 Michigan in Canton. Reservations are needed for the workshops. Each workshop costs \$10 per person, and is non-refundable. Classes are scheduled at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. The classes include a silk spring flower arrangement workshop.

Saturday, Feb. 24, and herbal workshop, Saturday, March 17. Call (734) 397-0800.

BACK TO SCHOOL

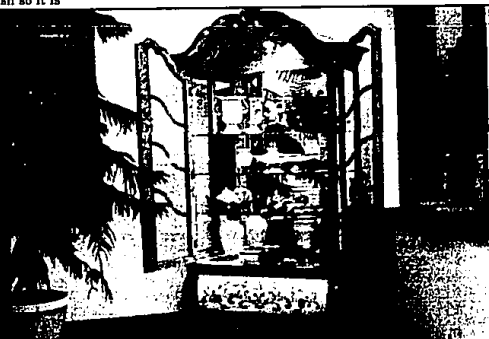
MORE GARDENING
The Michigan School of Gardening, 29429 Six Mile, in Livonia offers a variety of subjects. Register in advance. Classes are limited in size. Weekly classes usually are scheduled for 9:30 a.m., while evening courses begin at 6:30 p.m. Classes listed here will be taught at the Livonia facility. Here is a list of some of the classes, some of which require prerequisite courses or experience: Landscape Design, six morning sessions starting Tuesday, Feb. 20, and includes one Saturday, or seven evening sessions; Growing Vegetables, scheduled for three Wednesdays in mornings or evenings, starting Wednesday, Feb. 21. Propagation: Secrets for Making More Plants, scheduled for three Thursdays in morning or evenings, starting Feb. 22. Pruning Trees and Shrubs will be taught on two Mondays, starting March 19. Growing Fruit Trees, Shrubs and Fruiting Vines pre-

sented on two Wednesdays, March 14 and 21 and one Saturday, March 17. Garden Maintenance Workshop taught for four Wednesdays starting on March 28. Call (248) 4-GARDEN for information winter and spring classes, times and costs or click on www.michigan.gardening.com for class information or for classes at other locations in Detroit, Pontiac and Macomb Township.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN

Learn how to choose the best trees and shrubs to enhance the year-round color and interest in your landscape. Learn the pros and cons of various plant materials available to landscape the yard. Class is scheduled 7-9:40 p.m. for three Thursdays starting Feb. 8, or 9-11:40 a.m. Saturdays, starting March 10. The class is offered through Schoolcraft College's Continuing Education program. Other courses include Basic Perennial Gardening, 7-9:40 p.m., Wednesdays, starting March 14 and Hands-On Landscape, offered three days, 7-10 p.m., Thursday, April 19 and 26, and 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, April 28. Call (734) 462-4448.

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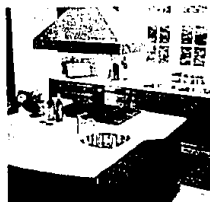
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