

NATURE ACTIVITY

KITCHEN SCRAP GARDENING



With a carton or two and a pinch of creativity, kitchen leftovers can turn into imaginative indoor gardens! In kitchen scrap gardening, you grow plants from items you'd normally discard or throw in your compost bucket, such as carrot tops or avocado seeds. Kids love the idea, and it's a great way to reinforce the sustainable living concepts of recycling and reusing.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

☐ Small paper cartons
(at least 1 per child)

☐ Potting soil

☐ Scraps such as seeds, roots, and stems from
kitchen fruits and vegetables

TIME: 1+ weeks

INTRODUCTION:

Plants have the amazing ability to make new plants in a few different ways, including through the sprouting of seeds and from cuttings of roots, stems, and leaves.

SEEDS

Seeds do not need to come in a seed packet; you can harvest them from any ripe fruit in which the seeds have reached maturity. You can find easy-to-grow seeds in some common fruits from the grocery store. Avocado, citrus (oranges, lemons, grapefruits, and limes), pepper, pumpkin, and watermelon seeds are good ones to try. Dry bean seeds from the soup aisle are also great for growing experiments. When placed in the right conditions with warm temperatures and moisture, the seeds will sprout and your young gardeners will have some new plants to enjoy.

CUTTINGS

Taking a cutting involves removing a piece of a leaf, stem, or root and placing it in a growing medium such as potting soil (some plants can even just be placed in water) where it then develops the other parts that were left behind (i.e., a stem will then grow roots, a root will then grow a stem). Some grocery store produce that you can use to start new plants through cuttings include sweet potatoes, potatoes, ginger, pineapples, and carrots.

INSTRUCTIONS:

STEP 1

Prepare your paper cartons to use as pots by washing and drying thoroughly. If you plan to grow your kitchen scrap garden using potting soil as a growing medium, make a few holes in the bottom of your carton to drain excess water.

STEP 2

Search your kitchen and refrigerator for fruit with mature seeds or fruit or vegetables that grow well from cuttings. See suggestions listed in the Introduction.

STEP 3

Plant scraps in potting soil or immerse in water. The best method for encouraging new growth will depend on the plant and plant part represented.

STEP 4

Place in a sunny window and watch your gardens grow!

Follow the specific instructions on the next page for some easy-to-plant scraps.



Presented by

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Here are specific instructions for some easy-to-plant scraps:

TUBERS

Sweet potatoes and ginger -- tuberous roots and rhizomes, respectively -- are plant parts that are easy to grow into new plants. Prop a sweet potato over a water-filled carton by poking three toothpicks in a circle into the middle of the tuber and resting the toothpicks on the rim of the container so that the narrower, pointed half of the tuber is submerged in the water.

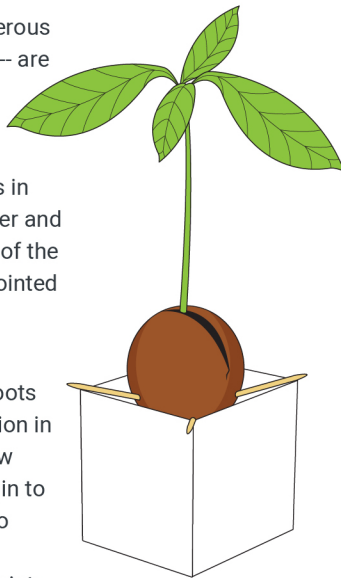
Place in a sunny window. Soon roots will begin to sprout from the portion in the water, and usually within a few weeks, stems and leaves will begin to grow from the top of the tuber. To keep your sweet potato as a houseplant, carefully transplant it into a container of potting soil once a good root system has developed. Depending on the time of year, you may also be able to plant it outside in a garden.

Ginger is particularly fun to grow because both the cut ends and the glossy new leaves (when crushed) emit a strong gingery aroma. Suspend a chunk of ginger with toothpicks over a carton filled with water or place it in a container of moistened potting soil. If using the water method, transfer the new plant to a container of potting soil once roots appear.

BIG SEEDS

If the small seeds are a hit, try growing big seeds like an avocado. Let an avocado pit dry out for a day or two, then plant it in a carton filled with moistened potting soil. Leave the tip of the pit exposed to air.

Another fun -- and easy -- way to sprout an avocado is to suspend the pit over a container of water. Poke three toothpicks around the middle of a pit and rest the toothpicks on the rim of the carton. Add water until it just touches the bottom of the pit. Kids can watch the roots and sprout emerge. If using the water sprouting method, replant the pit in potting soil once roots and a sprout emerge.



CARROT TOPS

You can force many root crops (beets, parsnips, and carrots, for instance) to sprout new top growth by chopping off the tops and planting them. Kids love the chopping part. Cut the bottom off of a paper carton to make a small saucer about 2" to 3" in depth. Fill with pebbles or sand and water. Slice off the head end of the carrot or root crop along with one to two inches of the root and place it in carton saucer. In a week or so new greens should appear from the top. You can replant your root into a container filled with potting soil (*note that your new plant will not re-grow another singular edible taproot but will instead produce fibrous roots).

This technique also works well with pineapples, although you will need a larger carton to grow it in. Cut off the top inch of the fruit and scoop out most of the yellow flesh inside the crown, leaving the core. Let the top dry for a day or two, then place it in a tray filled with pebbles for support and water. Roots will appear and new shoots will sprout from the top in about two weeks, and soon you'll have a fantastic tropical plant. To continue growing the new pineapple, transplant it into a pot, covering the crown and roots with soil.

LITTLE SEEDS

Seeds from citrus fruits, peppers, pumpkins, and watermelon are all pretty easy to grow. Fill carton pots with moistened potting soil. Remove whole seeds from the fruit and plant three to four of them one inch deep in the pot. The seeds will sprout in 1 to 2 weeks depending on the type of seed you use and the temperature. Keep the seedlings well watered for about four to six weeks and then you may be able to transplant your seedlings into bigger pots or out into the garden.

