



# Extension News Column

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**Date:** April 25, 2011  
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## **Propagating grocery store produce**

As the days grow longer and the sun rises higher, we begin to think about starting seeds for the garden outside. But don't forget about the *inside* of your home — you can start new houseplants *any* time of the year, especially for the unlikely varieties you can get from the produce section at the grocery store. These plants may not actually produce fruit in our Alaska climate, but they will fill your home with green foliage and are a fun challenge for your household. Plus, you can impress people by telling them that you are growing pineapples or other such exotic fruit plants in Alaska!

Some of the easiest plants to grow are avocados, pineapples, pomegranates, dates, citrus such as lemons, oranges and grapefruits, and apples. Some seeds may have already sprouted inside the fruit, which will help get them off to a good start. All you need is moist soil and a consistent watering routine to get your produce seeds to sprout.

The best way to get an avocado to sprout is to eat the green flesh and save the large seed. Then, rinse off the seed and, with the pointy side facing up, poke three toothpicks into the seed around the middle. The toothpicks will hold the seed on the rim of a glass and suspended in water. Place your avocado seed in a sunny spot and check periodically to make sure the bottom half of the seed is constantly submerged in water. The seed will crack, send down a root and then a green shoot will emerge. Be patient because this could take up to two months. Once the plant has a couple of leaves, you can pot it in soil and place the plant in a warm sunny window.

Pineapples are different because a cutting is planted, not a seed. Purchase a whole pineapple fruit, cut the green, leafy top off with about a half inch to an inch of the fruit on top. Let it dry for a day, then plant the top of the pineapple directly into a pot of moist soil. Cover a little of the yellow flesh with soil, water and wait. Place your potted pineapple top in a warm, sunny window and keep the soil moist. You will know that your pineapple has taken root by watching the inside of the green top. If the center of the leaf bouquet stays green and shows signs of growth, then you are successfully growing a pineapple plant. If the center turns brown and dries up, pull it up and try another one.

Date seeds can take up to three months to sprout, so be patient and persistent with your watering. After you have enjoyed the fruit, plant the pit vertically, pointier side facing up, about a half inch deep in moist soil. Place the pot in a warm spot (about 70 degrees Fahrenheit) and keep the soil moist and wait for the green shoot to appear. The plant will grow into a palm with stiff narrow leaves that could reach up to 5 feet tall.

For pomegranates, citrus and apples, choose the biggest seeds in the fruit or plant all of them and start a nursery. Plant the clean seed about a quarter inch deep into moist soil. I recommend putting a clear plastic bag or glass over the pot to create a small greenhouse until the seeds germinate. Once the seeds sprout move to a sunny warm window, and repot in the spring if necessary.

Remember that all of these plants come from areas with temperate or tropical climate. So, in the summer put them in a warm, sunny spot. In the winter put them in a cooler spot (50-60 degrees Fahrenheit) with as much light as possible, which may mean giving them some supplemental light here in Fairbanks if the plants start to look leggy. Keep the soil moist but not wet. With a little care, your propagated grocery store plants will fill your home with green all year and maybe one day you will be pleasantly surprised with a fruit!

Call your local extension office with any questions on these processes or information on further care.

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