

Avocado pear

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This exotic large-leaved plant is both quick and easy to grow from seed.

Avocado pears are exotic plants that are quick and easy to grow, and make attractive, evergreen houseplants with masses of dark-green leaves. They originally come from Central America, and are now grown in many hot countries, including Israel and the West Indies, where they grow into large trees. Grown in pots in this country, they can be kept much smaller, but they need frequent pinching to keep them bushy. Sadly, they won't produce any fruit, but they are worth growing for their lush foliage.

How to grow an avocado

Firstly, you will need to select an avocado pear that is very ripe and soft to the touch. The stones from these fruit are the quickest and most likely to sprout.

In the middle of the fruit is a very large stone. Carefully remove the stone using a knife, making sure you don't cut the stone. This is a slippery job, so watch your fingers.

To encourage the stone to grow, you will need to soak it in water for about two days. Sometimes the stones start to sprout inside the fruit. If yours has done this it will grow quicker, but it still needs to soak.

You will need a pot about 10cm across. Make sure there are lots of holes to let water drain out. Fill your pot with multi-purpose compost and water it very well, so that water starts to drip out of the bottom.

Plant the stone, fat-end down, and with the pointed top just sticking out of the compost. Put the pot in a see-through plastic food bag, and tie the end up; this keeps the moisture in and stops the stone from drying out. Put the pot in a warm place, an airing cupboard is ideal.

The stone will take between ten days and four weeks to sprout. You will know when it starts growing because the tip of the stone will split open. Once this happens, it won't be long before the shoot appears. As soon as you see the shoot, remove the plastic bag, and grow the seedling on a sunny windowsill.

Caring for your avocado

Avocado pears are fast-growing and will need to be potted on frequently. You can tell when your plants need repotting because you will see roots growing out of the holes in the bottom of the pot. If

left unpruned, avocado plants will become very tall and narrow. To encourage a more bushy and attractive shape, you will need to train the plants from an early age. When your plant reaches about 15cm tall, cut about 5cm off the top. After doing this it may stop growing for about a week, but, once it has finished sulking, it should produce new side-shoots and grow again with gusto. To keep your plant bushy, occasionally nip off the growing tips. This will help keep it smaller.

Grow your plant on a sunny windowsill or conservatory, the warmer the better. Water it regularly and feed it every two weeks during the summer with a general house-plant feed.

